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AUGUST 2020

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Political moves afoot



It's sometimes hard to fathom amidst the worry and focus on Covid-19, that 'big politics', which will profoundly affect us all once the pandemic is over, is still rumbling, inexorably, on. One very recent development, just as Countryside was going to press, was the government's decision to establish a Trade and Agriculture Commission, described by NFU President Minette Batters as a "hugely important development" in, hopefully, safeguarding our high food and farming standards – something this magazine has touched on regularly in the past few years.

We should be rightly proud of our farmers – and the recent pandemic has perhaps focused thoughts on this – and our desire to trade freely with the world must not be at the expense of undermining a proud and world-leading industry. You can read more about this on page 13.

Food of a different type with one of our interviews this month - with outdoorsman and all-round legend, Ray Mears. Countryside's deputy editor chatted to the TV presenter about what lockdown has meant for him and also about his venture into the world of cookery book writing.

Elsewhere in this edition, we have two competitions that I'm particularly fond of. Firstly, a chance to win a rather stylish ceramic BBQ for those occasions when the elements allow us to indulge in a bit of outdoor cooking, and, secondly, a competition to win a year's supply of British cheese from Fen Farm Dairy. Whilst lockdown has brought all manner of problems and sadness, for me, one of the small rays of light has been learning (and, yes eating, too) more about British cheese from my local farm shop. I even now have an entire shelf of my fridge dedicated to cheese. I kid you not. In all seriousness, it's a sector of our economy that most of us probably don't think a huge amount about, but we should cherish it and support our cheesemakers, wherever possible. The competition is on page 39, and you can delve more into the world of cheese on pages 22, and again on pages 78-80.

Lastly, as always, I truly hope you're keeping well and looking after yourself. It's been an incredibly stressful and bumpy few months for us all – and we're not out of the woods yet. But there is some light streaming between the trees and I earnestly hope that things get appreciably better for everyone soon.

Martin

Martin Stanhope
EDITOR

Meet the team



Lorna Maybery

Lorna chats to TV presenter and outdoorsman Ray Mears about what lockdown has meant for him and his new cookbook (*see pages 26-7*)



Ellie Kelly

As parts of the British economy slowly unlock, Ellie's been behind the scenes at British horseracing (*see pages 28-30*)



Steve & Ann Toon

Silent but deadly... The Toons explore the mysterious world of one of Britain's most-loved birds, the tawny owl (*see pages 103-107*)



Joe Stanley

Grateful for a bit of rain, Joe reveals some of the secrets behind another event in the farming calendar - hay and silage-making (*see pages 66-7*)



When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

What's in the **August** edition...



Need help finding the best cheese to suit your palate? **Charlotte Reather puts 38 cheeses to the taste test** **78**

REGULARS

6 News

Rural news from around the UK, plus, all the latest from your neck of the woods

42 Letters, blogs and polls

Front cover re-creation, inquisitive dogs, swallows and this month's caption competition

114 Three things I can't live without...

Glastonbury Festival founder Michael Eavis tells us his must-haves

COMPETITIONS

21 BBQ-ing for Britain

Win a Kamado Joe barbecue, worth £450

33 Competitions, deals and offers

Win a year's supply of British cheese!

40 Crossword and puzzles

Give your brain a workout with our quizzes and crossword



FEATURES

10 Let's back British berries

British growers reveal their summer harvest challenges

13 A million voices strong

Emma Crosby discusses the public's extraordinary backing for the NFU's food standards petition

14 Farming families

Lorna Maybery chats to a Yorkshire farming family about their diversification

16 Great British food with Miranda Gore Browne

Simple yet delicious seasonal creations, including an easy-to-cook recipe for the barbecue

22 Food and drink

Our favourite beers and cheeses to enjoy this month

24 Charlotte's rural web

Tim Relf chats to the BBC's Charlotte Smith about covering rural issues and her own love of the countryside

26 The wilderness chef

Outdoorsman Ray Mears talks about his love of nature, bushcraft, and his first ever cookbook



26

28 Racing returns

Jockeys, trainers and bookies reveal how lockdown affected them, and what it means to be back racing again

86 The secret life of the kingfisher

Robert Fuller gets up close and personal with a pair of these exquisite birds

91 When did you last...?

Make do and mend tips for our modern times



96 Reach for the skies

Adding interest to your garden just by looking up

103 Give a hoot for tawny owls

Investigating the mysterious world of this elusive feathered predator



RURAL WISDOM AND REVIEWS



48

46 Feathered focus - poor sitters and the Modern Game

48 The Good Life guide to garden chickens

50 Buzz from the beehive - getting started with beekeeping

53 The Dogfather, plus, Day in the Life of a Vet

54 Dog breeds of Britain and Ireland - the Lurcher

56 Nature Magpie

57 Gardening with Pippa Greenwood

58 Animal nutrition - give your piglets the best start

59 Equine focus - laminitis

60 Powering the rural economy - unlocking the potential of rural Britain

62 Business tips and tricks



58



66

63 How to... preserve flowers

65 Smallholder view with Clare Hunt

66 View from the Farm with Joe Stanley

69 Working 9-5ish

70 NFU Mutual helps you get back on the road

72 The Countryside Guide to... soil

77 Equestrian review - the latest horse products on test

78 Tested - 38 delicious British cheeses, tried and tested

83 Read it - this month's six favourite books

84 Wear it - the pick of the month's rural fashion



ON THE COVER:

13 A million voices back British food and farming

16 Great British barbecue edition: try our delicious summer recipes

26 Exclusive interview with Ray Mears

78 British cheeses put to the taste test

114 Three things Michael Eavis can't live without

COVER IMAGE: TOBY LEA

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Pledge on standards

The government has pledged to create a Trade and Agriculture Commission to help ensure British food standards are safeguarded in post-Brexit deals around the world. The move follows a tenacious 18-month NFU campaign that saw more than a million people sign its online petition, which was backed by newspapers and celebrity chef Jamie Oliver.

Secretary of State for International Trade Liz Truss confirmed the move in a letter to NFU President Minette Batters as *Countryside* went to press.

She said the new commission would examine “the policies UK government should adopt to ensure UK farmers do not face unfair competition and that their high welfare and production standards are not undermined”.

Mrs Batters said: “This is a hugely important development. We look forward to working with the government and other stakeholders in the days ahead on the Commission’s terms of reference, to ensure that its work is genuinely valuable.

“In particular, it will be vital that parliament is able to properly consider the Commission’s recommendations and can ensure the government implements them effectively.

“The NFU will continue to scrutinise the progress of trade negotiations with the USA and other countries, so that our future trade deals work for British farmers and consumers.”

● See page 13 for more on the food standards petition and Agriculture Bill



Inspiring children about British farming

With school closures back in March due to the evolving pandemic, and children all of a sudden at home, home-schooling became the new normal for many parents. Here at Countryside, we also got involved to help parents keep those little ones entertained.

Teaming up with EatFarmNow, our #LockdownLearning resources have been used by thousands of children and parents over the past few months.

From designing a tractor of the future, to making British snacks and getting your fingers dirty to make a propagator, #LockdownLearning kept children across Britain entertained.

While some children are now back in the classroom, there are still a lot at home. All of the activities are still available online, so have a scroll through and pick an activity to keep you going.

● countrysideonline.co.uk/lockdownlearning

LEAF Online Farm Sunday

Farmers from Cornwall to the Isle of Arran, and from Northamptonshire to Pembrokeshire took to social media for the first-ever LEAF Online Farm Sunday on 7 June, with thousands of consumers joining them on virtual farm tours to hear directly from farmers themselves about all they do for the environment, and to produce the food we eat.

The day marked the planned date of LEAF Open Farm Sunday, when hundreds of farms should have been opening their gates.

Caroline Drummond, LEAF chief executive, said: “The online event has given thousands of people a fantastic insight into all that British farmers do, and have continued to do, during these very challenging times.”

● The annual celebration of farming is now scheduled for Sunday, 20 September.

Please don't feed the horses!

The British Horse Society (BHS) has asked members of the public to not feed any horses they encounter while out and about.

With more people taking to the countryside during the Covid-19 pandemic, the BHS has been made aware of instances where horses have been seriously injured, made extremely ill, or, in some cases, have died due to the public feeding the horse.

Alan Hiscox, BHS director of welfare, said: “The BHS is urging members of the public not to feed horses in fields as this can cause serious illness and be potentially life-threatening.”

If you are a horse owner, you can download specially-produced signs to place around your fields at: bhs.org.uk/behorseaware.

The charity is also raising awareness of the toxicity of ragwort for horses. Ragwort contains toxic compounds that can poison horses. The BHS has produced a toolkit that offers guidance on how to identify ragwort. Visit: bhs.org.uk/ragwort.





'Class of 2020' brings in the watercress harvest

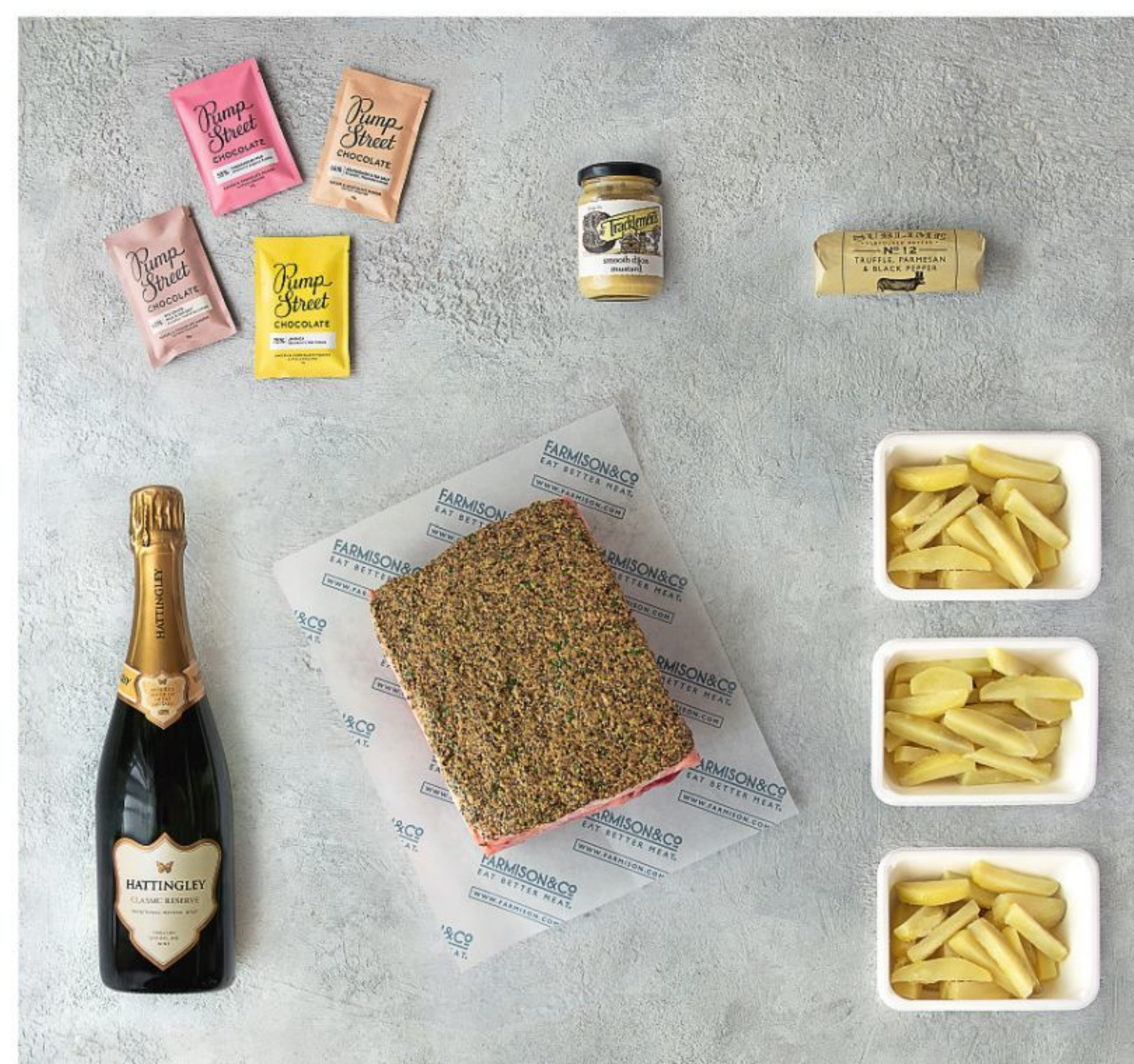
It may have lacked the usual fanfare of the traditional Alresford Festival, and it came with plenty of concerns about securing enough labour, but the UK watercress harvest is under way.

And, despite coronavirus, growers at The Watercress Company in Hampshire and Dorset say the prospects are good. They will harvest more than 600 tonnes of the 'super green' between now and October, cutting the crop every four-to-12 weeks.

With Covid-19 putting paid to many of their usual sources of labour, MD Tom Maery said the company had tapped into displaced domestic staff to bring in the harvest, with a sports instructor, designer, electrician, student, mechanic, builder, podiatrist and sailor all among the "class of 2020".

"We had a 10% drop-out in the first couple of weeks but, after that, everyone else settled in and now appear to be loving it," he said.

"For most, it's a complete change, but I think we are learning a lot from each other."



Great British Reunion Box launched

Online meat vendor Farmison & Co has launched a special way to celebrate being reunited with loved ones this summer - the Great British Reunion box. The limited-edition treat includes one British heritage breed 32-day dry-aged sirloin roasting joint, beef dripping chips, and a jar of Tracklements smooth Dijon mustard. And to drink? A bottle of refreshing and perfectly-balanced Hattingley Classic Reserve NV. Simply perfect.

● Find out more at: farmison.com

Getting crafty

An increasing number of us have taken up new hobbies and skills during lockdown, according to the BBC. Whether people are expanding their crafting skills as a way of exploring their creativity, to develop financial security or simply to manage their mental wellbeing, it seems that Britain is crafting its way through coronavirus.

Abbey England is a supplier of materials and tools for the equestrian and leather goods trades. Richard Brown, Abbey England CEO, said: "With many people still furloughed or self-isolating, some are finding this time of stillness an excellent opportunity to try new things. We have definitely noticed a shift in demand for tooling leathers and items for small leather goods, as more people find themselves at home and wanting to be creative."

National Lottery Heritage Fund pledges support

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has announced that its emergency grants can be used to help organisations to recover and reopen, post-Covid-19.

The Heritage Emergency Fund was set up at speed in late April to help the UK's heritage survive the impact of the pandemic.

Ros Kerslake, chief executive at the National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: "This is still a time of great change and uncertainty for heritage organisations, and we are with them in heart and mind right now as they take uncertain steps back into a fast-changing world."

Grants have so far supported heritage organisations with essential costs to keep them afloat. They can now also be used to build the foundations of recovery, which may include new operating and business plans, investing in digital, or the potentially significant costs of reopening under government guidelines.

Recent recipients of Heritage Emergency Fund grants have included:

Wensleydale Railway Association

- Heritage railway in Yorkshire Dales
- Grant used to refurbish three coaches and for essential maintenance to tracks and facilities

Scottish Seabird Centre, Scotland

- Marine conservation and education charity
- 5-star visitor attraction
- Grant helped support the charity during a time of zero income

Hestercombe Gardens Trust, Somerset

- Unique Grade I landscape with 1900s gardens by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll
- Home to endangered Lesser Horseshoe bats
- Grant helped cover operating costs

YOUR VIEW?

Have you taken up a new hobby, or had time to re-start a neglected one? We'd love to hear about it. Email: martin.stanhope@nfu.org.uk

From your region

1 SCOTLAND

Exciting moth find is a first

A tiny moth has been found in Scotland for the first time. The alder signal moth, *Stathmopoda pedella*, is black and orange with striped legs and a wingspan of just over a centimetre.

It was recorded at Jupiter Urban Wildlife Centre in Grangemouth by the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Falkirk ranger Claire Martin.

Claire said: "It's very exciting to have recorded the first alder signal moth in Scotland - it shows there's still so much we have to learn about Scotland's amazing wildlife

"There is every chance there are still other significant species here, just waiting to be discovered."

The moths have been recorded in the South of England, but this is the first time the species has moved as far north.



2 DERBYSHIRE

Chatsworth's garden reopening

Derbyshire estate Chatsworth House has reopened its world-famous garden and is welcoming back visitors with more than 50,000 new flowering perennials, shrubs and trees as well as a huge, new stone sculpture called Natural Course, by artist Laura Ellen Bacon.

Home to the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, the estate's garden will be open from 10.30am to 6pm every day, for pre-booked visits.

Sally Ambrose, head of visitor experience, said: "For everybody here, it's about being responsible and safe. That's why we've limited the number of garden visitors each day, with bookings only available in advance. We've also added extra safety measures and are asking our visitors to respect social distancing."



3 CONWY

Lockdown easing prompts tide of litter

People are being urged to take their rubbish home with them as increasing amounts of litter could have a "devastating" effect on health, wildlife and tourism in Wales.

Crowds of people have been gathering in public spaces since lockdown measures were eased in Wales. However, that has seen some beauty spots "treated like a rubbish tip" and significant quantities of waste and litter left behind. "There's no excuse for littering. Most people dispose of their litter responsibly, and it's disappointing that there's a minority of people who don't," said Conwy county councillor Greg Robbins.

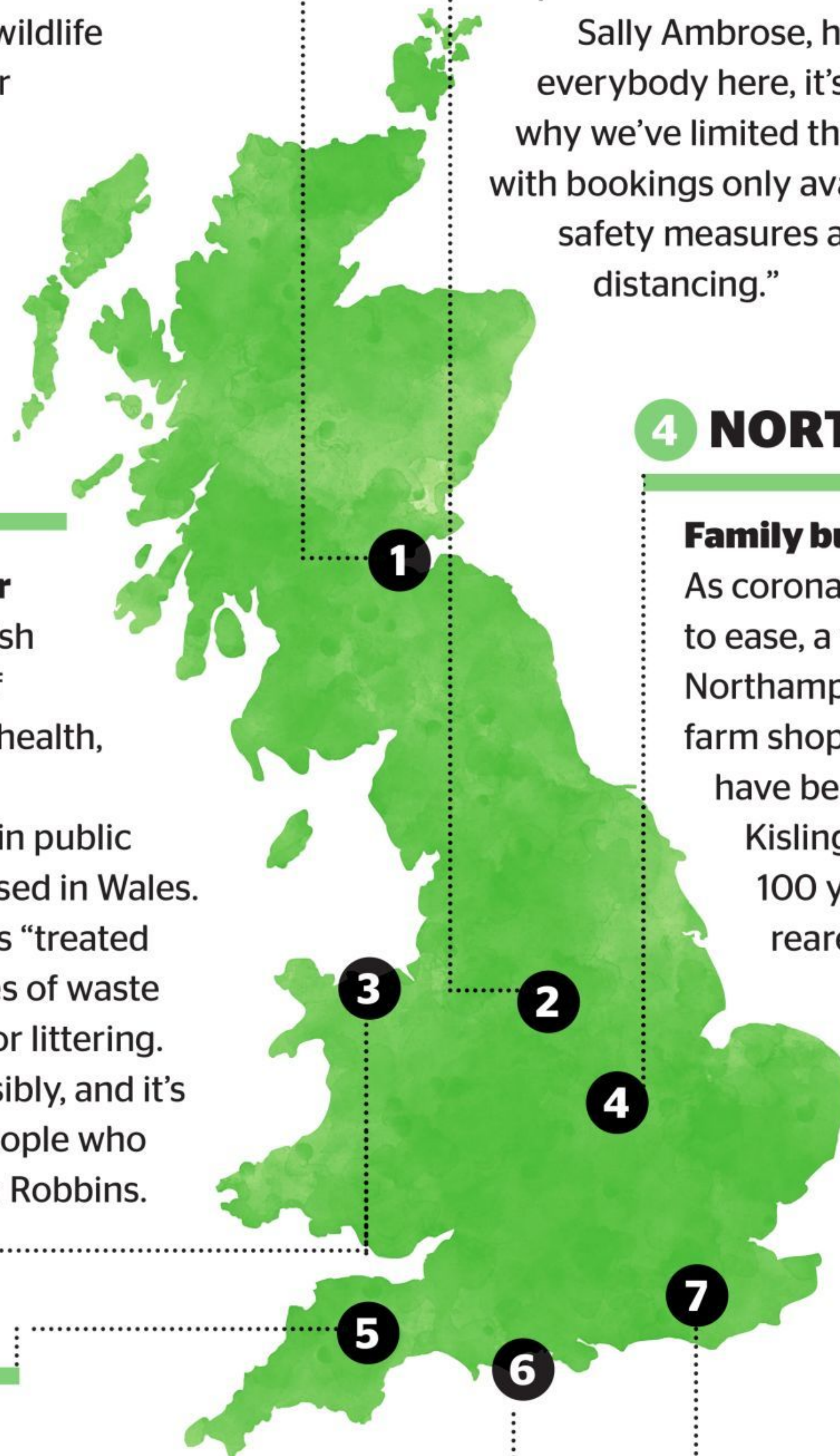
5 DEVON

New patron for the Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust

The Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust (DPHT) has announced that respected photographer Malcolm Snelgrove has become the charity's new patron.

The DPHT works with pony keepers on Dartmoor, promotes the Dartmoor pony for conservation grazing and manages 82 hectares of moorland and heathland at Bellever, Postbridge.

The charity's Dru Butterfield said: "We are thrilled and honoured that Malcolm has joined the charity as a patron. His passion for Dartmoor and its ponies, heritage and conservation certainly matches our own, so this is a very exciting time."



4 NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Family butchers open new farm shop

As coronavirus restrictions have started to ease, a traditional family butcher in Northamptonshire is opening a new farm shop at Noborough Lodge. Elliott's have been farmers and butchers in Kislingbury, Northamptonshire, for more than 100 years; their new farm shop serves home-reared meat, local produce, eggs, cheese, vegetables and store cupboard sundries.

Located between Weedon and Kilsby, in Northamptonshire, the old farm buildings, including the old milking dairy, have been carefully renovated to house chillers, meat counters, preparation space and display units.



6 HAMPSHIRE

Hampshire Fare say: 'Stay loyal, stay local'

Supported by Hampshire County Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership, Hampshire Fare's 'Stay Loyal Stay Local' campaign hopes to encourage customers to stay loyal to relationships they have formed with local independents, producers and suppliers throughout lockdown.

Tracy Nash, commercial manager for Hampshire Fare, explains: "During lockdown, we have seen local producers and independents come up with ingenious ways to service their communities. The core of our campaign message is loyalty. Maintaining these relationships is important for several reasons, including community, economy, sustainability and wellbeing."

7 SUSSEX

New rural crime team launched

Sussex Police have launched a new rural crime team, to crack down on unlawful behaviour in isolated communities. Made up of two sergeants, eight constables and six police community support officers (PCSOs), the team will be operating out of bases at Midhurst and Heathfield.

Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner Katy Bourne said: "Rural crime is particularly worrying and, since the Covid-19 lockdown, there have been disturbing reports of fly-tipping and expensive equipment theft. I want to reassure our rural residents that these crimes are being taken very seriously."



PHOTOS: ROMY JACKSON/SUSSEX POLICE TRAINING; CHATSWORTH HOUSE; OLAF LEILLINGER

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Let's back our British berries

Tasty, healthy and in season right now, **Lorna Maybery** looks at the world of British summer fruits



Words by:
Lorna Maybery
Lorna is Countryside's deputy editor who loves being in the great outdoors

AS YOU PILE YOUR DESSERT bowl full of blueberries and raspberries, munch on a punnet of strawberries, or bite into juicy cherries this summer, take a moment to consider how your favourite summer berries have journeyed from the field to your fridge.

You might be surprised to learn that during summer berry season, your British fruit has taken just 24 hours from picking to plate.

According to Nick Allen, (pictured below) the new boss of Berry Gardens, the UK's largest grower-owned marketing co-operative, there's nothing better or fresher than summer berries eaten in season.

"Once we move into June almost everything we grow is UK produced," he says. "At this time of year, UK berries are better because we are closer to our market. We are 24 hours from food to store, so you are getting fruit as fresh as you possibly can.

"At the moment, the freshest fruit available is grown in the UK; it's grown to consumers' tastes and is providing people with healthy, fresh fruit.

"This season has started really well and demand has been very good. There was a bit of a blip during

lockdown, but demand is now strong and I don't see that changing.

"We have plenty of fruit to supply to the market, particularly in July and August. Strawberry quality is going to be really high this year, in particular; the sunny weather through May has given the plants some good growing conditions, so I expect really good fruit quality."

Berry Gardens growers grow strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, cherries and plums.

"Being in the cooperative means growers own their route to market, and for those involved, it's fundamentally important to them to have that attachment and closeness to the customer," says Nick.

Growers face various challenges throughout the year, the biggest of which is the British weather.

"Ideally, growers would like to be able to produce the same amount of fruit every week, and, naturally, the weather doesn't allow you to do this, so the challenge for the whole industry is trying to forecast how much fruit you have and the fluctuations to that causes difficulties in the market and to the customers," Nick explains.



New varieties

Berry Gardens works with Driscoll's, which has one of the world's largest plant breeding facilities to research new varieties - so what are the summer berry varieties we should be looking out for this year?

"We are focusing on Driscoll's Victoria blackberry; it's the sweetest eating blackberry available in the market and beats the competition hands down," says Nick.

"It's an incredible thing to eat, it changes your perception of blackberries - it almost needs to be called something other than a blackberry because we have a perception of a blackberry and its taste

“

This season has started really well and demand has been very good.

"It's rather fluid. You get crop flushes caused by the weather and then you get the reverse, so the biggest difficulty is planning.

"February was interesting and it delayed plantings as we seemed to have a different named hurricane every week. It then followed with a really warm period in May, which brought the fruit on, so we have had big strawberry weeks for the past couple of weeks."

Nick says the berry growers are also dealing with issues around labour as a result of changes in the seasonal worker's scheme, while Covid-19 has prevented some overseas pickers from coming to Britain. So the recent 'Pick for Britain' campaign has been welcomed.

"There has been a huge response to 'Pick for Britain'," says Nick. "The response from UK nationals has been, in many cases, quite overwhelming, and growers were not geared up to deal with such a high number of applications.

"We are now seeing the right balance of local UK nationals combined with the traditional workforce, and, as lockdown is easing, more people from overseas are now coming in. There are enough pickers for now, but there could be openings in July or August for 'Pick for Britain' workers."

Nick, who is getting to grips with his new role, which he started just before lockdown, says that as we ease back to normality, he is confident this is going to be a good year for summer fruits.

"I actually think it's going to be a good season; there has been positive demand in the past four weeks and our healthy foods campaign is creating a strong, positive feeling. Great fruit is in good demand, and we definitely have great fruit." 🍓

Meet a strawberry grower

Bal Padda grows strawberries and raspberries in Worcestershire's Vale of Evesham all year, with the exception of six weeks in the winter.

It's a family business, employing 12 full-time staff and more than 200 seasonal workers.

He says that, despite the challenges of the past few months due to both the weather and coronavirus, it's looking to be a decent season for strawberries. Like the majority of growers, Bal and his workforce have had to carry on working throughout lockdown, to look after and then pick his crop of soft fruit.

"I think a lot of growers feel it's quite a privilege to be doing what we are doing. We are able to serve our country and be recognised for it and be a part of the bigger picture," says Bal.

"We are doing something by helping to keep Britain fed. That's an honour, and we feel blessed that we can do something positive. We can also employ people at a time when many people are struggling with work."

Bal says many of his seasonal workers had arrived just before lockdown, and a few more are coming into the country now, so he is not short of people to pick, but he has praised the 'Pick For Britain' campaign for raising the profile of growers' labour issues.

"Some of our seasonal staff had arrived already and the rest arrived in the past couple of weeks," he says "and we have had more people wanting to work this year than in our history. We were worried about getting staff in the face of Brexit, but 'Pick for Britain' has really helped. People are stepping up and giving it a go. And it has raised the profile of the need for pickers - but it's not unskilled labour, which makes me cross. These workers know what they are doing, they spend their work time picking and it is a skilled job."

Bal says his strawberries are a couple of weeks behind where they would normally be, but this has also turned out to be a blessing.

"We had the storms just before coronavirus and it wiped away some of our tunnels and damaged plants, so it meant our fruit was delayed. Had this not happened, they would have been ripe at a time when it was really hot and the strawberries would have been jam because of the heat!

"It's looking like a positive year for soft fruits," he adds. "People need to keep supporting British growers - during the crisis it didn't come to the stage of no fruit and veg on the supermarket shelves because growers continued to work and they did it with pride."



PICTURES: ISTOCK; BERRY GARDENS; SUTTERSTOCK

in our heads, but this is so sweet - it's a different eating experience!

"We also this year have Driscoll's Zara strawberry, which is a premium strawberry which has fantastic flavour. Zara, for us, means we can supply premium fruit for the whole of the UK season. The variety there is the most of at the moment is Morning Centenary and it's the biggest June-bearing strawberry available, and then we move into our mainstream variety and, for us, it's Driscoll's Katrina, which eats really well. So Katrina is your everyday strawberry that tastes really good, but Zara is the treat you can enjoy from time to time."

There's also a lot of research around cherries, the main focus of which is to extend the short 10-week season.

"We have a couple of varieties unique to us, one is Sequoia, which is a nice early cherry, and we have a late one called Centennial. We are also starting our own cherry breeding programme, which we are excited about."

Nick says they tend to stick to mainstream fruits, as niche varieties can be difficult to sell to the public.

"We dabbled in yellow raspberries, among other things in the past, but they didn't really take off, to be honest," says Nick. "They looked nice and golden, but no-one bought them."





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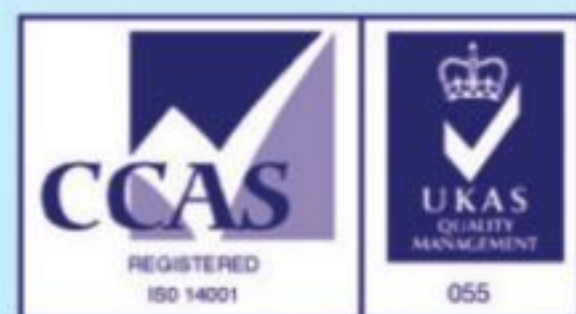
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A million voices strong

What next for our campaign to safeguard Britain's world-leading food and farming standards? **Emma Crosby** explains



Words by:
Emma Crosby
Graduate Emma works in the NFU's Westminster office and enjoys both walking and running

THE DEFINING moments of British politics can often be reduced to numbers; opinion polls jumping 10 points after barnstorming speeches and nail-bitingly close exit polls on election nights - politics truly is a numbers game.

But what happens when an issue comes along that is difficult to quantify – like our values?

How do we explain to our decision-makers that we, the great British public, want the food on our plates to be produced to world-leading animal welfare and environmental standards? With more than 1,000,000 signatures, that's how.

In June, the NFU's petition which urges the government to ensure that Britain's high food standards are not undermined by lesser standard imports in future trade deals surpassed one million signatures, making it the sixth biggest petition in recent UK history.

The petition urges MPs to support the creation of a Trade and Agriculture Commission that can review trade policy and develop solutions that ensure all food imports are held to the same standards expected of our British farmers.

The overwhelming level of public support for this petition shows to our politicians that our principles are not for sale in any future trade deals. This was further emphasised by 78,000 people writing to their MP over a two-week period, asking them to support the introduction of a Commission. We were very heartened in late June, when the government agreed to do this.

British farmers are world-leading pioneers, placing principles at the heart of their production. Our farmers are ready to compete with farmers around the globe who adhere to the same high

production standards as them, but they do not want to see food, which would be illegal to produce in this country, flooding our supermarket shelves.

Brexit, after all, was meant to be about the creation of a bigger, better Britain; not the age of chlorinated chicken and hormone-fed beef.

These core values are something MPs across the board supported as part of their 2019 general election manifestos. The Conservative's manifesto commitment, for example, is printed in black and white. It says: "we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards".

Not compromising British food production standards is laudable, but how can the government fulfil this promise if they are upholding high standards at home, whilst simultaneously importing food produced to lower animal welfare and environmental standards from abroad?

If the UK government is sincere in its commitment to not regress our food standards, it must put these sentiments into law.

The Agriculture Bill is continuing its legislative journey in the Lords, and, in September, there will be a key vote to see if the Lords will support any amendments. If they do so, the Bill will return to the Commons where MPs will be given the chance to either accept or reject these changes.

All amendments designed to safeguard standards were rejected by MPs when the Bill was at Report stage in the House of Commons in May. However, we are hoping, with one million voices behind us, the numbers will be in our favour the second time around and our politicians will do the right thing and safeguard the values and future of a great British industry. 🇬🇧

FOOD FROM BRITAIN:
Britain's climate, allied to our rich farming tradition, enables us to produce a plentiful and varied supply of food and drink



Catering for all

Lorna Maybery talks to a farming family whose diversification has seen their business transformed



Lorna Maybery
Lorna is Countryside's deputy editor who loves being in the great outdoors

WHEN the Smith family started their butchers and meat production business on their farm near Wetherby, West Yorkshire, little did they realise how central it would become to their business.

The family, who had no previous farming experience, bought Sykes House Farm in 1967 with the aim of breeding pigs.

Robert Smith explains: "My Dad, Martin, bought the farm with his father. Neither of them had been farmers before - my grandfather sold paint and had a little shop in Harrogate. My father wanted to join the army but wasn't allowed to because his elder brother was already serving and was posted overseas. Their middle sister was killed in a car crash at 16-years-old and so he was the last in the family at home and his parents wanted him to remain in Yorkshire.

"Originally from Harehills in Leeds; he left school at 15 and went to work for local farmers before it dawned on him that he could probably do it better than the people employing him. So, he put himself through agricultural college, all the while saving up, as he was still working and looking out for somewhere he and his father could buy.

"He was already breeding a few pigs on a neighbouring farm at the time, renting units off them, which led them to finding this slightly peculiar farm with its own slaughterhouse, and set about creating a pig farm."

Within five years, Martin had become highly regarded as someone who knew how to breed pigs and the farm grew exponentially throughout the 1970s. In a bid to diversify the business, the slaughterhouse building was converted into a farm shop at a time when people used to buy their meat in bulk to home freeze.

"The farm shop really took off. I remember as a kid there were queues down the lane, especially at the weekends, for people to come and buy their produce from us," says Robert.

"During the late 1980s, the pig industry had its problems and supermarkets started opening up so shopping habits changed, it became more about convenience, so dad was forced to change tack again. He was already doing meat deliveries to local pubs and restaurants and chose to expand this side of the business. The last pigs left the farm in the early 1990s and the cattle went a couple of years later. The large cattle shed was then repurposed as a meat production area to give ourselves some more space as we went into the food service side of catering butchers."

Branding themselves 'The Chef's Butcher', Sykes House Farm is now run by Robert and his team. Robert spent 10 years away from the farm serving in the British Army as an officer in the Royal

“
We contract local farmers to produce pigs and cattle for us... where we can, we buy high quality Yorkshire produce

FAMILY LIFE: From left, Robert Smith, his wife Jules, mum Marilyn, niece Eva, sister Rachael, his son Xander, father Martin, and daughter Bella





TOP CLOCKWISE
FROM LEFT: Master butcher Steve Manning works in the small shop on site and offers advice on products, specifications, cooking and recipes; premium quality meat at Sykes Farm; inside one of the meat stores; and produce is delivered around the area

Engineers; learning vital skills that have really helped him to take on the farm and continue its growth.

Martin remains chairman of the business and Robert's sister, Rachael, works as the sales director, having spent her formative years working in London, so it's still very much a family affair.

"We have 80 staff," says Robert, "these range from the management team both in sales and production, to the highly-skilled butchers, production staff – skilled at making real bacon, premium sausages and burgers, to packers and drivers."

Sykes Farm prides itself on providing a bespoke service to customers, sourcing meat from local farms in the majority.

"We contract local farmers to produce pigs and cattle for us and work with high welfare chicken farmers; where we can, we buy only high quality Yorkshire produce.

"When it comes to food provenance for our clients, we can tell them the farmer's name, we can also take them to our farmers to understand the provenance. And they can take photos on the farm for their menus, so they can show their customers where the food has genuinely come from. It's great to take the chefs/managers and the waiting staff from restaurants to the farms, so they can actually say to diners that they have been to the farm and met the farmer; that's a great thing to have.

"We really try and fit all markets, so we supply meat to the high-end Michelin-star restaurants across the north of England, all manner of cafes and restaurants, and we also supply schools, care homes, football clubs and hospitals; which is why we have had to stay operational during the pandemic."

During the lockdown, Sykes House Farm also sold products from their factory outlet shop, which has never been so busy.

"We have a lot of space and a big car park so we have been doing a lot of 'click and collect'; having already ordered and paid for their meat, our customers can pull into our car park, open their car boots (often electronically these days) – we then put the meat in the car and they can drive off. It's completely contactless and they are loving that.

"We are also doing 200-300 household deliveries a week, which is new for us. We have set up a new app on the Apple store so people can order their meat from the comfort of their armchair and it either gets delivered by us the next day or by courier. Things are starting to open up again and will hopefully get back to normal, but we will continue with the home delivery side of things, as it has gone down so well."

Robert still lives on the farm, along with his dad, and although it's run on a much smaller scale, the land still needs managing.

"Dad and I still look after the grounds and maintenance ourselves. We currently have 60 acres of spring barley in the field, we've got hedgerows and the rest of the estate to look after. Dad is now in his 70s, but he's still very fit and able and there's nothing he likes more than to be out attending to the land.

"We had been due to knock down and rebuild part of the factory, as the structure is heading to 50 years old in places, and we have been lucky to be awarded a second go at an EU grant to help pay for it, but, due to Covid-19, the plan is currently on hold.

"The ultimate aim is to revert the 60 acres back to pasture and renew our cattle herd for prime beef production, but, getting the company out of lockdown, and back into a profitable state is the first priority." 🐾

● sykeshousefarm.co.uk

Great British Food

With Miranda Gore Browne



Words by Miranda Gore Browne

Miranda is a food writer, home-baking expert and finalist on the first series of *The Great British Bake Off*. Follow her @MirandaBakes, on Instagram and Facebook as Miranda Gore Browne.

I SAW A KINGFISHER this morning. I have been desperate to see one since one muggy evening a month or so ago when the children were playing by the river after a fractious home-schooling day and I closed my eyes for the briefest of moments, and missed the two blue flashes as a pair of kingfishers darted past.

The children were cross with me, told me I should have been looking. I was cross with myself for giving into the overwhelming sense of tiredness that being everything to everyone brings.

This morning I went early to the river, for some time to clear my head and to have a precious walk alone. Time to switch off from the lessons and questions of the day. Time to think about 'my stuff', to make notes and think about recipes I might love to be making on a sunny day in August that would be lovely to share with you.

It was then that I saw it, bigger than I had imagined, fast and silent and barely six feet from me and I watched, transfixed, and holding my breath as it swept past. It was oblivious to my presence, passing over the fallen tree where the children have balanced and danced and climbed and round the bend in the river where the footpath doesn't reach any further.

It felt exotic, beautiful, something different, a flash across my bows at the start of the day. Finding the extraordinary in the ordinary, making something out of nothing, has been one of the many challenges we have all experienced

in lockdown. Flipping difficult situations and making them fun, knowing that food is one of the ways many of those have done this, has given us a different perspective; we have cherished eggs and flour in a new way to before. Simple things we, for so long, took for granted have become noticed and important and I hope we can hold onto that.

The food debate has raged on through lockdown. Our dedicated farmers keeping food coming, our deeper understanding of the food supply chain and the harsh reality of what it has meant for so many to not have enough food was a wake-up call for even the usually more privileged.

I have thought about food during lockdown even more than I usually do, and that's a lot, but having cooked 770 meals (or thereabouts) I feel like it's time to bring the joy back, to be more creative and make a break from the monotony of trying to think what to cook with what we have in.

I love the escapism of planning ahead, menu planning for parties or suppers with friends. I also love jolting my memory back to food we have eaten and places we have been and recreating those tastes and foods to share with others.

So, perhaps August is the time to focus on, to plan for, when the pressure of home-schooling has eased and I can arrange small meet-ups for the children, for us all, to see small numbers of friends and family, too.

On our tables should be meat and produce from rolling British fields, windy moors and steep hillsides, boisterous courgettes and their sunny nodding flowers, fat peas and plump broad beans.

One of the good things that has surely come out of this time that, for so many, has meant worrying food poverty, fear of shortages and the inability to get the basics is that we should keep things simple, know and understand the provenance of food and how it reaches our table and support our farmers and local producers in every way we possibly can.

Make sure you do what you can, let's all learn from this experience and cherish our food and farming standards.

Helping others

And let's not forget how we can help, too. Food poverty is a huge issue for many and a rush on food at the start of lockdown left many food banks and food charities short of supplies. Make sure you drop anything you can into your local food bank (or make a donation online) or into one of the many UK Fareshare hubs. The work of footballer Marcus Rashford to bring about the reinstatement of free meals for children over the summer holidays has brought to all of our attention the critical position so many families are in at the present moment.



Barbecue fun

Here are a few things we have enjoyed making on our barbecue that you might like to add to your outdoor cooking menu this summer! Don't forget they can be great to use as a mini oven and can even be used to bake brownies or cakes. Have fun experimenting and enjoy using all the fabulous summer produce, too.



Baba ganoush

Aubergines are in season in the UK by August. Lightly oil the grill and griddle for about 30-40 minutes, turning regularly until they are blackened and soft. If you barbecue on coals, wait until they are completely white and tuck the whole aubergines into the heart of the coals. You want them to char beyond recognition. Remove from the heat, scrape the middles into a colander and let the liquid drain away. Put the remaining flesh into a bowl, stir in the juice of one lemon, one clove of garlic (roasted or finely crushed), one tablespoon of olive oil and, if you have some tahini, then add one tablespoon (it will still be delicious without).

Baked new potato salad

Pop small, scrubbed new potatoes into a sturdy baking tray, drizzle with rapeseed oil, add a few lemon wedges and sea salt. Stand the tray on the grills and turn the potatoes regularly, they will take about 25 minutes to cook. Make a dressing with mustard, mayonnaise, and a little cider vinegar and whisk together. Chop spring onions and mint and drain some capers from the jar. Let the potatoes cool a little and toss everything together. Delicious eaten warm or put in the fridge for another day.

Stone-fruit

Halve plums or peaches. Oil the barbecue grill well after cooking (you will need a medium not fierce heat) and then cook for about three minutes on each side. Put some soft cheese (ricotta or soft cream cheese) into a bowl, add a tablespoon of honey, some orange or lemon zest and spoon onto the fruit as soon as they come off the barbecue. Drizzle with some more honey, sprinkle on some toasted nuts or seeds and you have a super simple and delicious pudding.



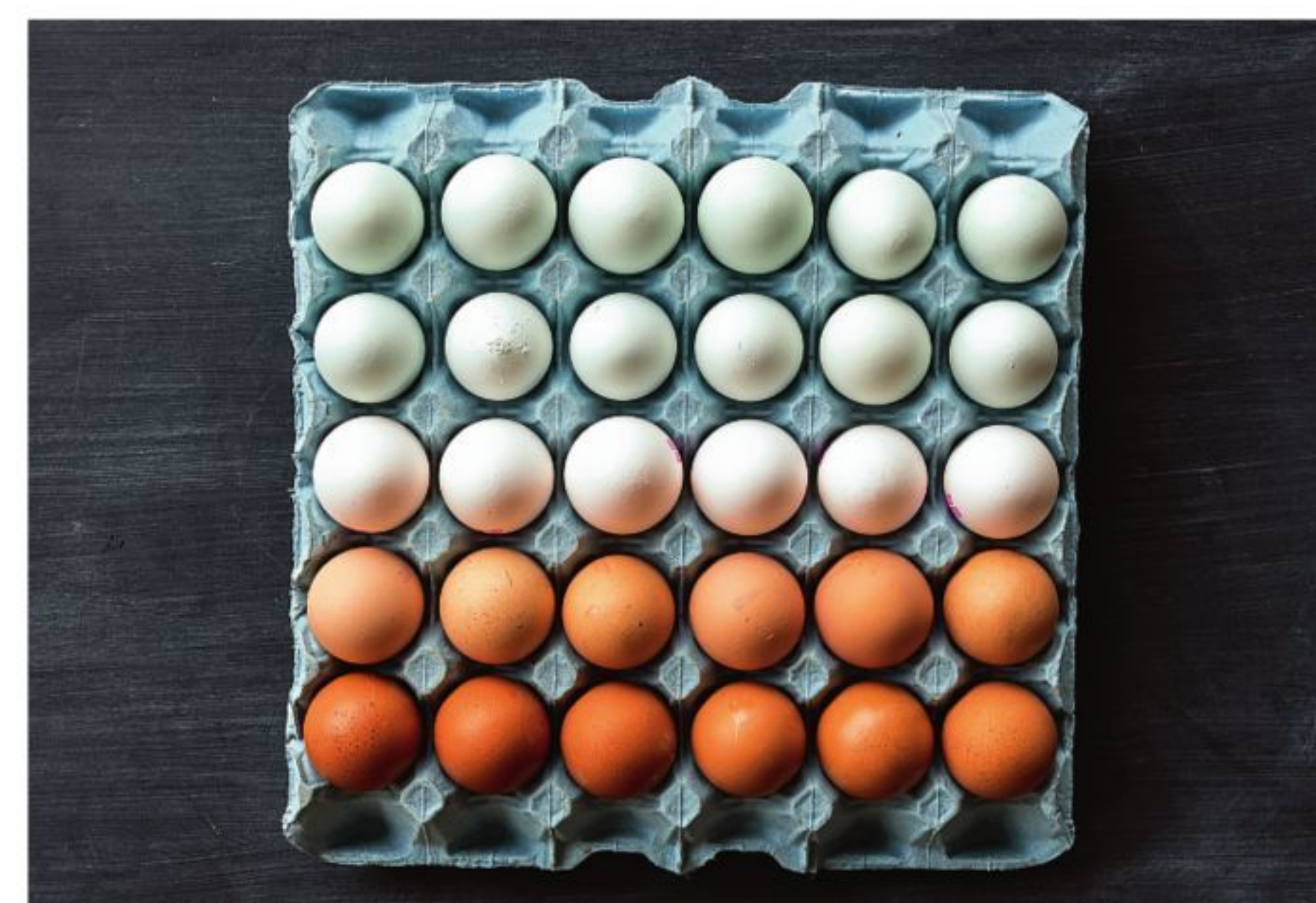
Strawberry skewers

Soak wooden skewers in water or use metal skewers. Push the skewers through the strawberries and then brush all over with rapeseed oil. Put onto the barbecue grill, making sure the flames have died down. Sprinkle with a little sugar and cook for about three minutes, turning carefully. Have a tray and some tongs at the ready to scoop up any escapees! Scrape the strawberries off the skewers onto really good vanilla ice cream and sprinkle a few chocolate shavings on top for extra deliciousness.



Chocolate and raspberry brownie slabs

Grab a bowl and mix together 100g plain flour, 2 tablespoons of cocoa powder, ½ teaspoon of baking powder and a pinch of salt. Add 200g of sugar and stir together. Melt 110g butter and 100g milk chocolate and pour over the dry ingredients. Add two eggs and mix everything together well. Spoon into a buttered cast iron frying pan or skillet or a well-greased old baking tin and sprinkle over a handful of marshmallows, a handful of raspberries and some chocolate chips. Stand the tin on the barbecue grill and close the lid, leave to bake for about 30 minutes (depending on thickness). Best eaten warm with a spoon and with scoops of ice cream, but if you have more patience than I do, leave to cool and firm a little before slicing into slabs!



The beauty of eggs

Eggs are a brilliant source of protein – a perfect package to support new life. They contain key growth nutrients, a whole range of vitamins and research shows they can help prevent many chronic age-related conditions, too.

Eggs have been a staple to us during lockdown, in every manifestation from dippy to poached, fried to scrambled, as a key ingredient in cakes and bakes, quiches and carbonara, a perfect partner to sourdough and salads. So, let's celebrate British eggs, bake with them, cook with them, be inventive with them and, by doing so, know you're helping British farmers.

Look out for British

You will probably be seeing lots of white eggs in your shopping at the moment. I wondered why this was the case and did some digging! It's because white-shelled eggs used to mainly be used in processing or restaurants as ingredients. These eggs have now been diverted to the shops to help meet the increase in demand for eggs by everyday shoppers during lockdown. White shelled eggs are just the same quality as brown and brilliant for all our egg recipes.

If buying eggs in the supermarket, look for the Lion mark or Union flag to help you identify they're British and you don't necessarily buy the large or extra-large eggs, as most recipes are fine with medium sized eggs.

Freezing eggs

Did you know that eggs can be frozen for up to a year, although it's recommended to use them within four months for freshness.

First of all, each egg needs to be cracked out of its shell. The egg white and yolk will expand when frozen, so if left intact this could damage or break the shell. Only freeze eggs which are fresh and in date. To freeze eggs whole, the white and yolk will need to be beaten together. Pour the contents into a container suitable for the freezer, label with the date, seal and freeze.

Make sure you label the freezer bags with how many egg whites or yolks they have inside. This will mean you always have eggs on standby for baking, too.

Frozen eggs in any form need to be fully thawed to be used and can only be eaten in thoroughly cooked dishes.

● Find out more at: egginfo.co.uk

Recipes

Make the most of the summer by cooking and eating outdoors, says Miranda Gore Browne

Green summer vegetable and melting cheese tart

I cheated and used shop-bought puff pastry for this recipe, as it's so much quicker than pizza dough or homemade pastry, but you could use those instead. Pile it high with all the summery green vegetables you can lay your hands on, spoon over the cream cheese and egg mixture, scatter with torn garden herbs and bake. It's super quick and easy, but a pretty and delicious addition to summery lunches and suppers and a great addition to any barbecue too.

Ingredients

30g butter
1 tbsp of rapeseed oil
1 clove of garlic
Baby spinach leaves
4 spring onions
150g asparagus spears
100g green beans (or broad beans, peas, courgettes)
200g cream cheese
2 eggs (1 for the tart filling and 1 to brush on top)
2 tsp of lemon zest
Fresh mint and dill
Salt and pepper
250g British mozzarella style cheese, Feta style cheese, goats cheese or ricotta all work well
320g of all butter puff pastry
You will need a large, flat baking tray



Method

- On a lightly-floured worktop, roll out the puff pastry until it is a rough rectangular shape and about 2-3mm thick, line a flat baking tray with non-stick baking paper, brush with a little oil and then put the rectangle of pastry on top.
- Make a border around the edge of the pastry with a knife, cross-hatch and brush the border with egg, then put into the preheated oven to bake for about 10 minutes, or until golden and puffed up.
- While the pastry is in the oven, put a frying pan on the heat, add the butter and oil and cook the spring onions with a clove of garlic until they are soft.
- Add the green beans and asparagus and cook until tender and then finally add the spinach and some chopped herbs (I used dill and mint) or baby beetroot leaves and cook until they wilt.
- Take out the clove of garlic and put to one side (keep for the mint pesto if you are going to make the lamb recipe opposite).
- Put the cream cheese and egg into a bowl and beat with a fork. Season with a pinch of sea salt and freshly ground pepper.
- Take the tart out of the oven and put it on a stable, heatproof surface. It will have puffed up hugely, gently press down the middle part so you can put everything on top.
- Spread on half of the vegetables, then the cream cheese and egg mixture, then the remaining vegetables, making sure they are evenly distributed across the base.
- Shred the mozzarella or similar style cheese over the top.
- Brush the pastry edges with more beaten egg and press some seeds on top.
- Put the tart back into the oven to bake for a further 10-15 minutes (keep a careful eye to check the edges don't burn!)
- Remove from the oven, scatter with more herbs and edible flowers and eat immediately.



Honey and herb marinated lamb with hazelnut mint pesto

I asked the butcher to butterfly half a shoulder of lamb and, as soon as I got it home, I mixed together all the marinade ingredients, slathered it over the meat and put it in the fridge. As you know, I am not super organised or good at planning ahead but, it is really worth making the effort to do this, I promise!

Serves 3-4

Ingredients

I used a 900g half shoulder of British lamb, butterflied by the butcher

For the marinade:

3 tbsp of rapeseed oil
3 tbsp of cider vinegar
3 tbsp of honey
3 cloves of garlic
1 shallot (or half a red onion) finely chopped
A handful of fresh or dried oregano
1 tsp of sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper
A small bunch of fresh rosemary (finely chopped)

- Put all of the marinade ingredients into a bowl and mix together with a fork.

- Put the lamb into a deep dish and pour the marinade over the top, rub it into the meat a little, cover with foil or baking paper and put into the fridge for three hours or, if possible, overnight.



For the pesto:

1 garlic clove (ideally roasted)
1 shallot or half a small onion
75g toasted hazelnuts
1 bunch of mint leaves
8 tbsp of rapeseed oil
Juice of 1 lemon
50g finely grated strong hard cheese

- Toast the hazelnuts in the oven, set a timer for five minutes as they burn very easily.
- Leave them to cool on their tray and then use a tea-towel to rub off their dry skins.
- Once they are completely cold, pop them in the food processor or crush in a bowl with a rolling pin, or use a pestle and mortar.
- Put all the ingredients in the food processor or finely chop and mix together. Add a little more rapeseed oil if it's too stiff.
- This can be made in advance and kept in a lidded jar in the fridge for up to a week.



To cook the lamb:

- Take the marinated lamb out of the fridge and leave covered on the worktop to come to room temperature for about an hour.
- Start your barbecue in your usual way.
- Make sure half of the barbecue is smoking hot. Put the lamb directly onto the grill over the hot coals or over the hottest area (if it's a gas barbecue) and cook the first side for a few minutes, this should brown it nicely. Then turn it over to brown the other side.
- Once it looks well browned, move the lamb to the less hot side of the BBQ to cook for about another 20 minutes (this will vary according to the thickness of the meat and how rare you like it). Turn it often and have a brush to hand to brush on more of the marinade from the dish. Then lift into a roasting tin and generously spread the pesto on top. Leave it to cook for about 10 more minutes before lifting it off the heat, covering it with foil and letting it stand for about 10 minutes.
- Slice with a large knife and pile on top of lots of green leaves (I used baby spinach leaves, beetroot leaves, peas and herbs), spoon over all the warm pesto and juices from the tin and dig in.



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Say cheese...

Tracey Colley from the Academy of Cheese suggests three more British cheeses to tempt your palate



Whilst traditional Academy courses are suspended during lockdown cheese lovers can still sign up to online eLearning Level 1 and 2 classes or virtual classroom courses at: academyofcheese.org

Hafod

Hafod is a handmade organic cheddar made at Bwlchwernen Fawr in West Wales using unpasteurised cow's milk. The farm has been managed by the Holden family since 1973 and is home to their herd of 80 Ayrshire cows. Hafod is made using long-forgotten cheddar-making techniques. The resulting cheese is matured for 12 months, lovingly brushed and hand turned as it breathes in the unique atmosphere of the maturing stores. The texture is soft and springy, the cheese melts in the mouth. Excellent with a malt whisky, such as Lagavulin or Talisker.

● holdenfarmdairy.co.uk



Ragstone

Ragstone is a matured goat's cheese log made in Dorstone, Herefordshire by Charlie Westhead. The creamery was set up in 1996 and quickly gained an excellent reputation for its handmade crème fraîche, Greek-style yoghurt and cheese. The goat's milk is supplied by neighbours Andrew and Diane Goodwin from their flock of Toggenburg/ Saanan goats. The cheese has a creamy-white mould rind, pure white interior, and the texture is smooth and creamy, getting more liquid as it matures.

Perfect with a chilled glass of Sancerre. Also delicious with local Herefordshire Perry.

● nealsyardcreamery.co.uk

Wrekin Blue

Martin Moyden started cheesemaking in 2005. Inspired by his grandmother's tales of traditional farming and food production, he set about producing a range of handmade cheeses using traditional recipes. Based in rural Market Drayton, Shropshire, Wrekin Blue, named after the local landmark The Wrekin, is made from unpasteurised cow's milk supplied by nearby Abbey Farm at Hawkstone. Wrekin Blue has a rustic-looking natural rind holding in place the unctuous cheese inside. Try pairing it with a good sweet dessert wine or a robust dark ale.

● moydenscheese.co.uk



Raise a glass

Need a little adventure in your life right now? **Melissa Cole** recommends you use the glorious medium of beer



Melissa Cole is a member of the Guild of Beer Sommerliers and is one of the UK's leading beer and food experts

Ahhhh, adventures, I remember those. Well, we can at least escape via the medium of beer; not too much mind you, or apparently you have to go to meetings again.

This month's magazine has a bit of wildlife and adventure theme to it, so I thought I'd take the second part as I am yearning to go on one, my last one being the Atlantic rainforest of Brazil, where I learned about native plants and ate some wildlife (the ants are surprisingly tasty!).

Fourpure Hemisphere 4.2%

● Available from fourpure.com

Fourpure's Hemisphere is gilded with balloons and has the same light, airy nature in its drinkability. Tangerine and mango sit lightly on the palate and it's a real sunshine sipper, perhaps in a boat.



Fuller's Frontier 4.5%

● Available from fullers.co.uk

Fuller's easy sipping lager is one to grab for the end of a long hike, or perhaps to sit beside the grill at the end of a long lawn-mowing session. Light orangey notes and a tinkly carbonation makes it a gently pleasing companion.

Siren Craft Brew Lumina, 4.2%

● Available from sirencraftbrew.com

You don't get much more adventurous than space, and that's where Siren looks to, with its latest release. With hints of canned peach and pineapple, with a twist of grapefruit, it's definitely tasty enough to leave you feeling slightly cosmic.



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Charlotte's rural web

Charlotte Smith is often seen and heard on TV and radio talking food and farming. The presenter tells **Tim Relf** about her passion for the countryside



Words by:
Tim Relf

Tim is a novelist,
freelance journalist
and mightily keen
greenhorn gardener

CHARLOTTE SMITH'S career as a rural presenter began in the 1990s in a lift in Birmingham. The then-consumer reporter was in a BBC office when the editor of the BBC's rural affairs programmes walked in to the lift with her. There'd been a mix-up with rotas and he was urgently looking for someone to present a couple of episodes of Farming Today.

"I told him I didn't know anything about farming, but he still asked me if I could help," she recalls. "I thought I might end up doing it once or twice, but I got completely hooked."

Nowadays, Charlotte is a regular on Radio 4's Farming Today, which airs at 5.45am on Monday to Friday and 6.30am on Saturday, and also appears on BBC1's Countryfile on Sundays.

"There's more of a need for these programmes now than ever before," says Charlotte. "We're all talking, all the time, about our food and the environment – and that basically is farming."

"There are enormous changes coming in terms of how, as a nation, we support farmers and what we expect of them, so one of the jobs of both shows is to explain more what those changes will involve

and what they mean for everyone."

While some of the Farming Today and Countryfile audience have a knowledge of the subject, many don't, so the challenge is to convey often complex messages in simple and interesting ways, she says.

"We've got to translate them into a way that's accessible and clear, without simplifying it so much it becomes nonsense."

Her assignments are hugely varied and, though she tends to cover the more serious subjects – one recent interviewee was the US Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue – she also throws herself into lighter topics with gusto.

"I once went bog-snorkelling for Countryfile. It was a lot of fun, but cold and really stinky. Afterwards, I had a quick shower and then got on a plane to go to Scotland to film another item for Countryfile and halfway through the journey thought: 'What's that awful smell?' I realised it was me. I was giving off 'eau de bog'!"

Charlotte didn't come from a farming family – her parents worked in libraries – but having grown up in the village of Quorn in Leicestershire was

familiar with rural life from a young age.

“It was a fantastic place to be a kid but, as I got older, like a lot of teenagers, all I wanted to do was escape.”

She originally set her heart on being an actress, but ended up studying English and Drama at the University of Kent, where she got involved with the student paper and the campus radio, plus volunteered at Radio Leicester during the holidays.

“I was bitten by the bug of journalism. It’s a fantastic career – it’s a licence to be nosy and I’m incredibly nosy by nature, although people in the countryside are usually really welcoming and keen to show and explain what they do. I’m so lucky – I get invited into people’s businesses – which are usually also their homes – and they tell me about their lives.”

Farms, she says, are intrinsically interesting places because so much is always happening. “There are a lot of myths about agriculture, so it’s also important to debunk that. Some people do still think farmers are all older men who wear battered flat-caps and chew on straw. Nowadays, though, it might actually well be a 20-something woman flying a drone across a crop to work out where to apply a targeted fertiliser.”

Before she specialised in the countryside, her career included spells as both reporter and



VARIED ASSIGNMENTS:
Charlotte Smith travels throughout the country filming for Countryfile and interviewing for Farming Today

producer, with periods in local radio, Radio 5 Live and Radio 4, including on The World Tonight (“I learned so much – because I didn’t really know where abroad was when I started”).

She even had a stint covering sports on East Midlands Today, which saw her encounter the infamous football manager Brian Clough.

“I’d had a knee operation and was on crutches covering a Nottingham Forest training session and Cloughy, who was cross with the goalie, shouted at me: ‘Oi, you – have a go in goal – because you’ll be able to do better than him!’

“I’ll never forget the image of Stuart ‘Psycho’ Pearce racing towards me with the ball when I was feeling very fragile and wobbly!”

When she’s not busy in the media, Charlotte acts as a conference host and is a former president of the National Federation of Young Farmers’ Clubs.

“It’s a great organisation that does huge amounts in rural areas for young people’s social and personal development. One of the areas they’re fantastic on is helping people build their confidence with public speaking. Having the chance to get experience of public speaking, for me, was a really important part of finding my career and my own voice.”

So how would she describe the voice that’s so familiar to so many devotees of TV and radio? “Even after all these years, I’m still always mildly horrified when I hear myself,” she laughs. “I sound a lot posher than I actually am.”

As for her dream presenting gig, what’s the one thing she’s still love to have a go at?

“I’d love to read the shipping forecast on Radio 4. And on telly, it would be Loose Women. I recently had another knee operation and, stuck at home, I became totally obsessed with that show!”





The wilderness chef

Bushcraft expert **Ray Mears** is helping others to cook up a treat in the great outdoors, thanks to his first ever recipe book, as **Lorna Maybery** discovers

WRITING A BOOK about cooking in the great outdoors seems provident in the current climate, but Ray Mears assures me it's been years in the making.

"I couldn't have whistled this up in the past few months," he laughs. "It was a labour of love because, as well as putting together the recipes, I did all the cooking and photography."

"People have said for years I should do a cookery book. Then my son gave me a blank book and asked me to write all my recipes down for him, and so I thought: 'if I was going to do that, I might as well do the book'."

Ray is recognised worldwide as an authority on bushcraft and survival, becoming a household name in the 1990s through his television series including *Ray Mears' Bushcraft and Survival* with Ray Mears. He runs bushcraft courses around the world, establishing Woodlore, one of Britain's first bushcraft schools, with a base in East Sussex, and has written numerous books, but *Wilderness Chef: The Ultimate Guide to Cooking Outdoors* is his first foray into recipes.

Ray has always cooked for himself while in the wilderness, but putting his recipes down on paper proved more challenging than he anticipated.



Lorna Maybery
Lorna is Countryside's deputy editor who loves being in the great outdoors

"The recipes are normally in my head," he says, "and I'm very instinctive; this much of this, a little of that, so to do the book I had to work out quantities, which was a nightmare!"

"I had to cook things a number of times to get it right and I wanted the recipes to work for people at all levels. When you're experienced and used to cooking, you make little changes and tweaks all the time – recipes are more of a starting point. I try to capture that feel in the book, there are lots of options in the recipes, if you haven't got this, you can do that instead, and so on."

And his recipes have been profoundly influenced by the people and cultures he has met on his travels around the world and he's drawn to the simplicity of aboriginal cooking.

"I have a great love for the First Nations of our planet. I feel a kinship with them and have always respected them," he explains. "Sometimes they are criticised for the way they cook, and yet there's a lot of wisdom in their methods. It looks different than we are used to, but the food is fresh, it's cooked immediately, it's hot, and is not preserved but largely eaten straight away. I like the directness and immediacy of it."

As well as recipes, Ray looks at the type of

equipment and tools suitable for cooking outdoors and talks about various cooking methods – from grilling and frying to using a Dutch oven. There is so much more to cooking outdoors, he believes, than simply barbecuing. He bakes bread, makes sauces, and even includes recipes for upside down cake and jam roly poly.

“When I’m out and about, I don’t cook many desserts, but upside down cake is brilliant because it’s easy to cook, you can do it on a stove.

“I included the jam steam pudding, because, in modern healthy eating we have often forgotten things from our past. A hundred years ago that sort of dessert was popular outdoors, especially for people who had been working physically hard all day. So I just wanted to keep some of the good stuff from those days.”

Ray is also keen for youngsters to have a go at his recipes, all of which can also be cooked indoors.

“What I like about the book is if a youngster picks it up because they want to cook in a simple, survivalist way when they go to university, the book will still be of use to them because there are some fantastic recipes. They could have a really good university life because cooking with real ingredients is a lot cheaper and often much healthier than buying packaged food.

“There are dishes for pasta, rice, potatoes, lovely sauces – things like the Ghurka curry or the Chicken Potjiekos are really nice and easy.

“I think the no-knead breads are a good starting point and, if you’re a fisherman, then Topsy Trout is fabulous and very straightforward too. It’s great for me as I’ve got all my favourite recipes in one place. Cooking is such a social thing, it should be fun and something you enjoy with other people.

“One of the things I like about cooking outdoors is we really honour the ingredients, that’s important to me, whether it’s a vegetable or flesh, it’s special. If you think of your food that way, you can’t go far wrong.”

Ray has always had a deep respect for the natural world and teaches this ethos in his courses.

“Wildlife is my life; bushcraft is built on working with nature so that’s always been a part of my life and is a never-ending study, which is a great joy. You never run out of something to learn.

“This lockdown has been the longest period in my life that I’ve been indoors. I was always the boy who, from an early age, wanted to be outside all the time. I became interested in expeditions when I was about 15 and went to work for Operation Raleigh in the early 1980s and I’ve never looked back.

“Bush skills transform your experience of nature, as they make you feel as though the outdoors is your home and completely at ease in wild places. That brings a very special empathy with nature that’s difficult to put into words; you have to feel it deep inside yourself.”



Chicken Potjiekos

“A chicken potjiekos is a wonderful thing – so quick, so easy, so satisfying. You have not cooked outdoors until you have had a chicken potjiekos,” says Ray.

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 1 medium onion
- 2 large carrots
- 4 medium sweet potatoes
- 4 tbsp oil
- 4 chicken thighs
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 cup (190g) dried apricots
- 2 corn on the cob
- 1 cup (250ml) chicken stock or white wine or Madeira sherry
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste
- Plain white rice

Method

1 Peel and roughly chop the onion, carrots and sweet potatoes while the potjie (small pot food) heats over a moderate heat.

2 Heat the oil, then add the onion to the potjie and sweat for about 15 minutes, until translucent.

3 Add the chicken thighs, skin side down, and cook until they begin to brown, turning twice.

4 Add the bay leaves, then layer the carrots over the chicken and the sweet potato over the carrots. Sprinkle dried apricots over the sweet potato.

5 Cut the corn through into 2.5cm (1in) slices and place these over the other ingredients. Pour over the liquid.

6 Replace the lid and cook gently for one hour. Be sure that the potjie does not dry out.

7 After one hour, check that the ingredients are cooked. If so, serve with plain white rice.



Ray’s reluctant to reveal his favourite place in UK for fear that everyone would then want to go there, but says everyone needs to find their own special part of the world.

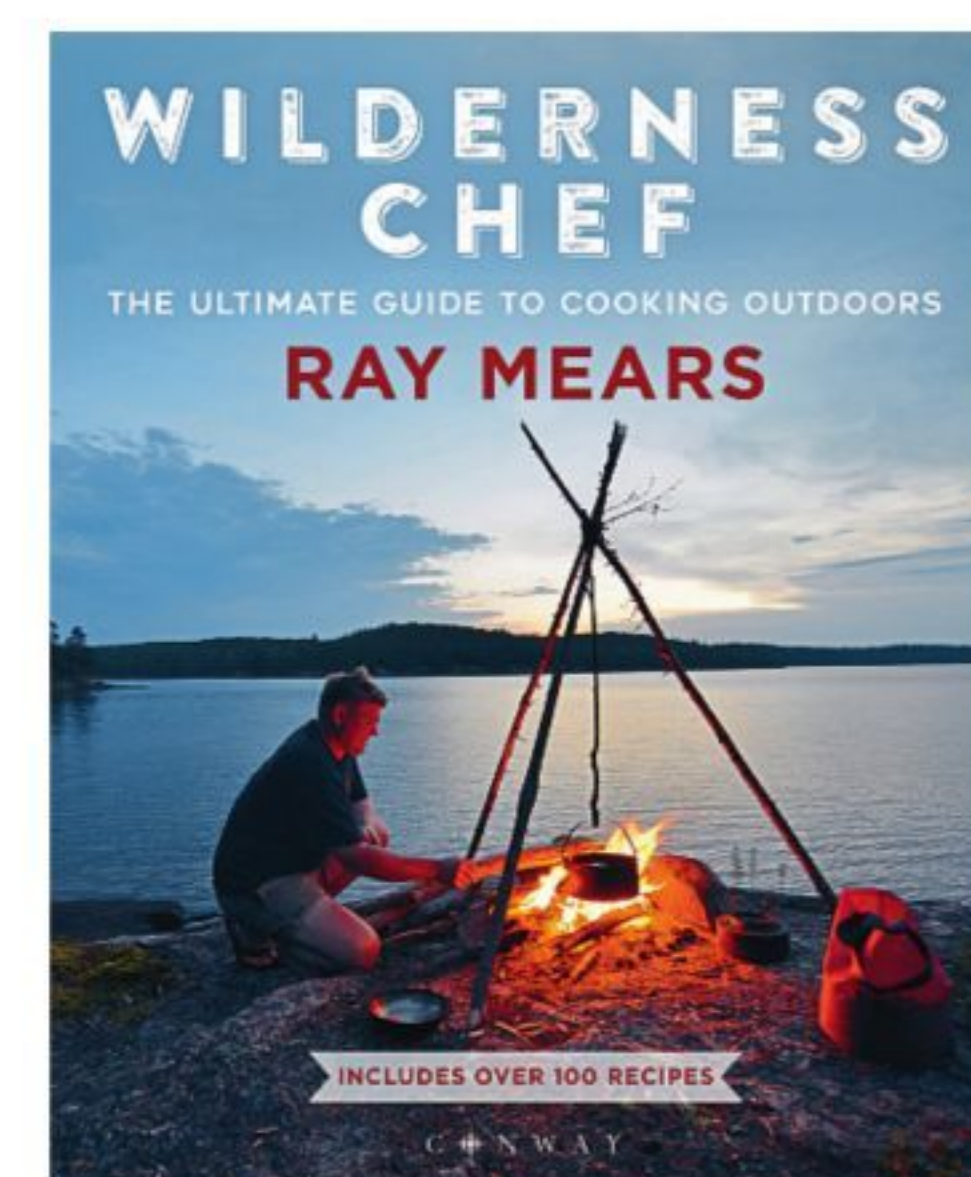
“Each of us needs to find somewhere near to home, so you can go there regularly and witness the seasons change and see how the wildlife responds, to know what’s going on.

“Where I live, last week, the fallow deer gave birth. There are these moments in the year that are special

in nature and it’s remaining attuned to those that’s important. We have amazing wild country in the UK, few countries are as interesting – it’s so diverse in such a small space.”

● Countryside readers can save 20% on Ray’s new book by visiting: bloomsbury.com/uk/wilderness-chef-9781844865826/ and entering the code WILDERNESS20.

● The offer is valid from 10 July to 10 August 2020.



● ‘Wilderness Chef: The Ultimate Guide to Cooking Outdoors’ is published in flexiback by Bloomsbury, priced £20.

Racing returns

Ellie Kelly caught up with leading figures from the horse racing industry to reveal their experience of lockdown and racing behind closed doors.



Ellie Kelly

Ellie is an event rider, horse trainer and a freelance journalist specialising in all things equestrian

HORSE RACING was one of the first sports to resume after the lockdown, but it has still taken a massive hit from the pandemic. In normal times it is one of the country's most popular sports in terms of attendance, with four of the top ten sports events in the UK. Around 5.8 million people attend the 1,500 fixtures held at 59 racecourses and it's an industry worth an impressive £3.5 billion to the British economy. Here's how it affected some different figures in the racing industry.

The jockey: Hollie Doyle

Hollie was having the time of her life before racing was shut down in March. The 23-year-old flat jockey from Herefordshire had just gone into the record books for winning more races than any female jockey in a calendar year, with 116 winners in 2019. This year had started well, too, with 35 winners in less than two months.

"I didn't enjoy the lockdown at all. As jockeys we aren't used to having any spare time on our hands. Some people might appreciate a bit of a break but, for me, it was a nightmare. Luckily, we were able to continue riding out the horses in the morning, so I've been doing that every day. You get home at

about 12 noon, then you have the rest of the day to kill, which is pretty painful for us jockeys.

"My boyfriend Tom, also a jockey, was in Australia. He had a very different lockdown experience, as they were racing behind closed doors throughout. He loved it out there and had the time of his life riding at all the big meetings. He also had his first Group One win, whilst I was stuck at home with no racing to even plan for.

"We started racing behind closed doors on 1 June and, at the smaller race meetings it felt little different, because there aren't usually many people there. Although it was very strange at the bigger meetings.

IN SIMPLER TIMES:

Goodwood, like all British racecourses, hopes to welcome back the crowds soon



“Royal Ascot was just weird though. I’m not a jockey who plays to a crowd, but it really helps to have the crowd behind you. It’s the large crowd and atmosphere that makes it such a big meeting. Although I had my first ever win there this year, so it was still the best day of my life. I have been dreaming about that for as long as I can remember and it wasn’t even expected on this horse.

“It’s been really good to be back. I have been getting loads of rides and quite a few wins. In fact, I have been racing every day since it started again. It is hard because it’s tiring, but I have never seen it as a job – it’s a lifestyle – and having the lockdown made me realise how much of my life it consumes.

“The protocol at the racecourse is pretty strict. We get our temperature taken and have to answer questions on our health, before we can even enter. Then we have to wear a facemask, even when we are riding, which I don’t like at all. There is a one-way system in the weighing room, so it doesn’t become

over-crowded and we have to stay in our own pods when we get ready.

“There are no saunas which a lot of the jockeys use to sweat off the weight, so they have to sweat before they come to the racecourse. Although they have an extra 3lb allowance to compensate. There are no showers either, which means you can leave the racecourse a bit hot and sweaty if you have had lots of rides.

“We don’t know what the future holds but, right now, my plan is to keep riding winners and to have more wins at the big meetings.”



The racehorse trainer: Hugo Palmer

Hugo is based in Newmarket and trains horses on the flat. He would normally expect to have horses racing every day during the season.

“On a day-to-day basis, lockdown didn’t change much of what we did – just how we did it. When the country was on higher alert, all the horses in

Newmarket were trained in pairs rather than strings. We social-distanced in the yard, too, which is fairly easy when you’re on horseback because, if you get within six-feet of each other, you are probably going to get kicked.

“We didn’t lay off any staff and the majority of training businesses have not had to furlough many staff. We have managed as an industry to be quite self-sufficient, but we are all like that on the whole, anyway.

“It was strange with no entries and with much less to do. We would be finished work riding by 11am, which, in many ways, was quite nice, and we went weeks without a horse running badly, so that took the pressure off! Newmarket is usually so busy, but it’s been very quiet. I went everywhere on my bicycle rather than my car when the country was in lockdown and the weather was lovely. I have a seven-month-old son, so I got to spend a lot more time with him than normal.

“We are back to reality now, so it’s very busy again, but it’s nice to get back to a rhythm and have something to aim for. I don’t think the horses noticed anything as they were kept in training. We are delighted to have the racing back on, but behind closed doors, it feels very sterile.

“All my owners have been patient, but they would love to get back on a racecourse soon. I do think there is no point until bars and restaurants open, even in an outdoor setting, as there’s little for them to do.

“As to what happens next, none of us have a crystal ball. The racecourses are not making money, but the majority are racing with levy board money. I hope to have some runners at Glorious Goodwood, but it’s hard to talk about big goals because some dates are not confirmed. And, of course, we may get a second wave of Covid-19, so we should just enjoy it while we can.”



The Racecourse: Adam Waterworth, managing director of Goodwood Racecourse

In a normal year, Goodwood would welcome thousands of people through their gates, with a busy calendar of events including 19 days of horseracing. Glorious Goodwood is their flagship meeting, a five-day festival traditionally held at the end of July. They usually expect 25,000 people per day who come to experience racing and hospitality.

“It has been as difficult for the racecourses as it has for all businesses,” says Adam Waterworth. “We knew that racing would be one of the first of all sports to resume, so we kept the skeleton staff to manage the ground so we were ready to go at short notice. Preparing the track takes a lot of work. The ground staff were unaffected, but everyone else was furloughed until June.

“As we speak, we are working towards allowing our members to come to Glorious Goodwood. If bars and restaurants are allowed to operate, I can’t see how we can’t operate under the same guidance. We have had plan A-Z in place since racing resumed and we raced behind closed doors in June.

“We were very keen to do this before Glorious, so we knew all the procedures were in place. At worst, we know we can do five days behind closed doors, so the festival is definitely happening. We know



it won’t be the normal 25,000 a day with all the hospitality open, but at what point between those two extremes, we aren’t exactly sure.

“Racing is treated as a professional sport, but we are not a seated stadium, we are very much an open air event, so that should make it easier.

“Seventy per cent of our revenue is driven by hospitality and tickets and that’s all gone, so we are set to lose millions. We are lucky that racing has a relationship with bookmakers, where there is a commission payment for bets placed even on races behind closed doors.

“The closed-door experience is utterly bizarre. For example, the March stand at

Goodwood is a good spectator view point and it’s normally a sea of panama hats. At our first race meeting, there were eight people in the whole grandstand. The racing was great, but it just felt odd.

“ITV Racing has done a great job: the replay on ITV looked a lot better on TV than it did at the racecourse!

“Prize money has been significantly lower this season so that will affect everyone - owners, trainers and the jockeys. Sponsors who won’t take part this year at Goodwood have rolled over for next year. A number of sponsors including Qatar have agreed to support us this year and that means we will be able to offer prize money at Glorious Goodwood worth more than most meetings, so that should prove attractive.

“Lockdown has also taught us a lot about our people and how much Goodwood means to our staff as well as our members. The government furlough scheme was a Godsend to enable us to keep our team during that time of uncertainty. There were a lot of people that didn’t want to be furloughed. Rather than being happy to be paid for not working they were all sitting at home, grumpy as hell and desperate to come back. So that is a nice thing to remember from all this.”

PHOTO: PA PICTURES

The sports betting platform: Ed Nicholson, Unibet

Betting is a huge part of the industry and contributes a large levy from betting activity. Betting on horseracing is thought to be worth around £14 billion per annum.

“We have been down to about 20% of our normal turnover from racing,” says Unibet’s Ed Nicholson. “This is the longest period of time I can remember where people in the UK haven’t been able to bet.

“We have a global platform which offers betting all around the world, so we have various media deals and if you wanted to place a bet and watch the race, you could do it easily. For the first few weeks we were looking around to see what sport other countries were still offering. So, to begin with, we offered horseracing in Ireland until that was stopped, then greyhound racing in Ireland. Then there was racing in Australia, Hong Kong and the US.

“Most people were waiting for UK racing to return. When it did come back, it came back with a bang. About 1.8 million watched Royal Ascot on the Thursday alone, which shows racing has not lost its appeal.

“The British Horseracing Authority have been fantastic too. They put together a very good package of racing and made sure enough money was coming through from the betting levy. They also made sure that when racing came back that they put on the right races to benefit the owners, the breeders, the trainers and the jockeys, as well as the betting industry. They put on a good hybrid of lower grade and big races to suit every need.



“Unibet are the official all-weather sponsor at Kempton and when that came back, we sponsored the whole fixture card. We used the opportunity to show our thanks to frontline workers and also to say ‘there are bigger things than racing and betting’.

“We obviously missed out on the Grand National which is the number one racing event, but, on the upside, the betting industry raised £2.6 million from the ‘Virtual Grand National’ and every single penny went to NHS charities. Then Unibet sponsored the Britannia Handicap at Royal Ascot and all profits went to charity.

“I think the racing industry has done a really good job in a difficult time and, if there is anything positive to come out of it, this has been a real opportunity for racing to show what it does best and hopefully grow the audience.” 🐾

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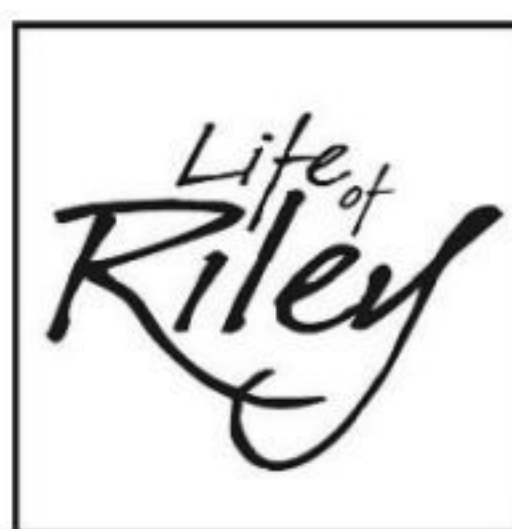
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As a thank you, we would also like to offer our NHS and emergency workers a 20% discount on annual NFU Countryside membership and gift membership. For full details please visit: bluelightcard.com.



Competition entries



Due to Covid-19, our offices are closed until further notice and we are unable to process postal entries. To enter, email your name, address and membership number to countrysidecomp@nfu.org.uk



Or you can enter online via competitions and offers at: **countrysideonline.co.uk**

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: Closing date for all competitions unless stated otherwise is 14 August 2020. The promoter is the National Farmers Union (the NFU) Agriculture House, Stoneleigh Park, Stoneleigh, Warwickshire, CV8 2TZ. The promotion is open to all residents of the UK, including the Channel Islands, aged 18 years or older, except the Promoter's employees or contractors and anyone connected with the promotion or their direct family members. By entering the promotion, the participants agree: (a) to be bound by these terms and conditions; (b) that their surname and county of residence may be released if they win a prize; and (c) that should they win the promotion, their name and likeness may be used by the Promoter for prearranged promotional purposes. (d) to take part in any post promotion publicity. The NFU cannot acknowledge receipt of entry and no entries will be returned. Entrants must supply to the National Farmers' Union their full name, email address and daytime telephone number. Only one entry will be permitted per person, regardless of method of entry. Bulk entries made by third parties will not be permitted. The winning entrant(s) will be: a) the first entry drawn at random from all the entries after the closing date; or b) the first correct entry drawn at random when the competition asks a specified question. The Promoter's decision as to the winner is final. The winner(s) will be notified within 7 days of the close of the promotion by post/telephone/email. There is no cash alternative and the prize will not be transferable. Prizes must be taken as stated and cannot be deferred. The Promoter reserves the right to substitute the prize with one of the same or greater value. The name and county of residence of the winner(s) will be available by sending an SAE to Winners List Request, NFU Countryside magazine, NFU HQ, Agriculture House, Stoneleigh Park, Warks, CV32 7RJ within two months of the closing date of the promotion. The Promoter reserves the right to amend these terms and conditions or to cancel, alter or amend the promotion at any stage, if deemed necessary in its opinion, or if circumstances arise outside of its control. The Promoter does not accept any responsibility for lost, delayed or fraudulent entries. If the winner is unable to be contacted within 21 days of the promotion's closing date, the Promoter reserves the right to offer the prize to a runner up, or to re-offer the prize in any future promotion. The Promoter excludes liability to the full extent permitted by law for any loss, damage or injury occurring to the participant arising from his or her entry into the promotion or occurring to the winner(s) arising from his or her acceptance of a prize. The promotion is subject to the laws of England. The Promoter has rights in perpetuity to use any submitted entries, but the original creator retains overall copyright & if your submission is a photograph which children are the subject of, you consent to that photograph being utilised by the NFU Privacy notice: The National Farmers Union is the Data Controller and will process and use all personal data supplied in accordance with our privacy policy which can be found here: countrysideonline.co.uk/assets/106609

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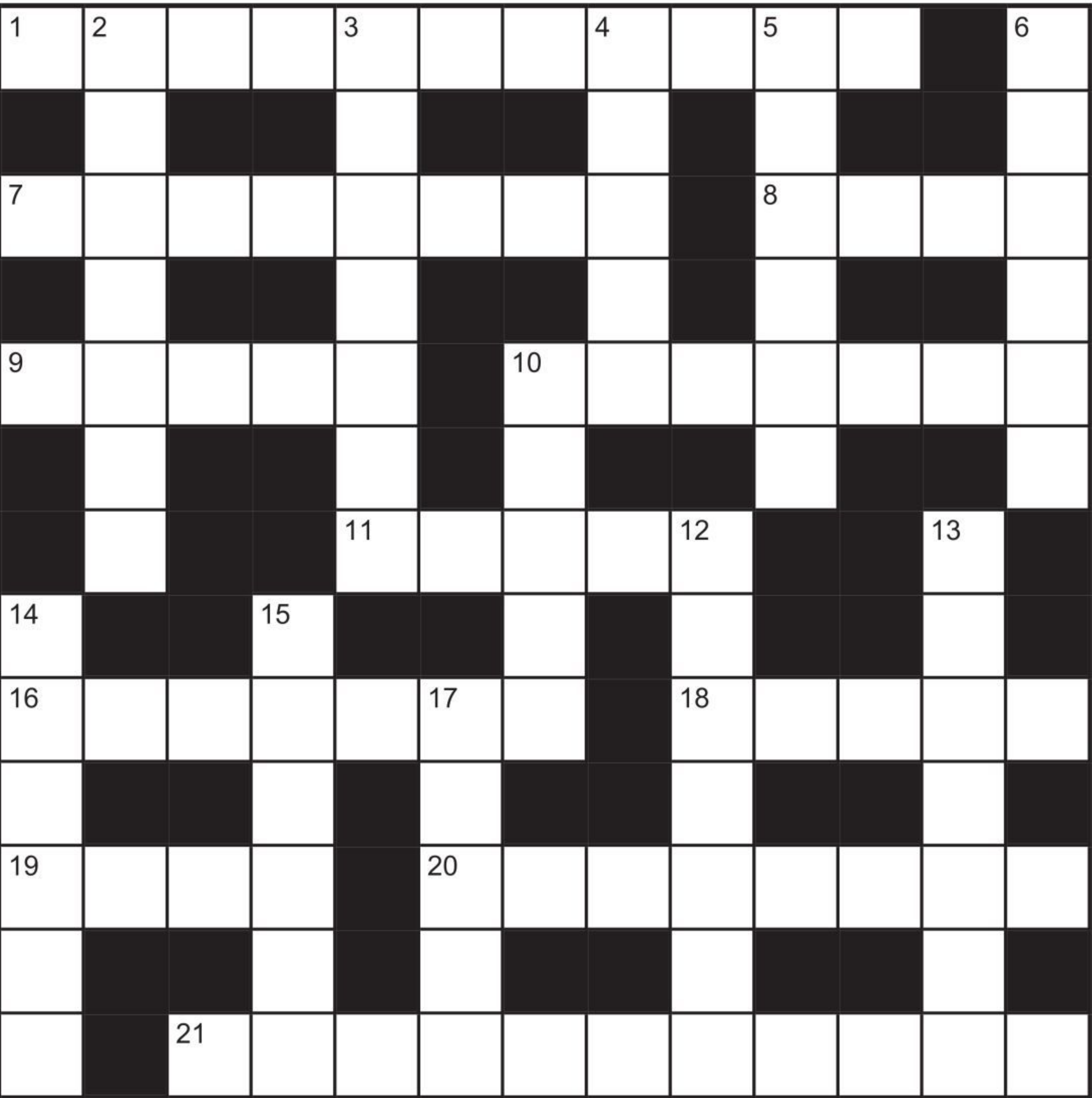


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The Countryside puzzler



The winner of this month's crossword will receive this stylish Towton cap from Timothy Foxx, worth £56. The new Towton cap, with its

eight-piece patchwork tweed, is made in the modern 'Bakery' style, which is flattering on both ladies and gents. It sits deeper on the head, feeling more secure and its extended curved peak makes it look awesome. It comes in the following crown sizes:

- Small UK 6 ¾ - 55cm
- Medium UK 7 - 57cm
- Large UK 7 ¼ - 59cm
- X-Large UK 7 ½ - 61cm

- For more information, visit: timothyfoxx.co.uk
- For your chance to win this lovely cap, send your completed crossword and contact details, by 14 August 2020, to: Countryside Crossword, NFU HQ, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire CV8 2TZ and we'll print the answers next month.
- The winner of June's crossword is Shelagh Duffy of Devon

ACROSS

- 1** The growing or cultivation of fruit (11)
- 7** Condensed moisture of the atmosphere made so virulent by pollution that it causes environmental harm, chiefly to forests and lakes (4,4)
- 8** Small soft feathers of a young bird (4)
- 9** 1942 American animated film concerning a deer (5)
- 10** South American plant with thick roots grown for food (7)
- 11** High-pitched cry of a horse (5)
- 16** ____ House, rural retreat on the Isle of Wight for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert (7)
- 18** A sweet-smelling spice popular in Indian cooking (5)

- 19** Young shoots on a plant, which may later become a leaf or flower (4)
- 20** Scientist who studies plants (8)
- 21** Market town in Gloucestershire lying on the River Churn (11)

DOWN

- 2** Area of land on which fruit trees are grown (7)
- 3** The decaying flesh of young animals (7)
- 4** Polynesian country in the southern Pacific Ocean mainly reliant on agriculture, forestry and fishing (5)
- 5** Small plant with red or white roots mainly used in salads (6)
- 6** Plant that grows and dies within one year (6)

- 10** Backbone of an animal with adjoining meat, cut for cooking (5)
- 12** An area of land equal to 10,000 square metres or 2.471 acres (7)
- 13** Major coffee port in north-eastern Italy near to Slovenia (7)
- 14** Loud rapid gurgling noise made by male turkeys (6)
- 15** ____ tree, shrub or tree that has been kept very small by growing it in a little pot and cutting it in a special way (6)
- 17** ____ rot, a grey mould deliberately cultivated on grapes in order to perfect certain wines (5)

The answers to last month's crossword



CONGRATULATIONS TO:

- Winner of the glamping break at Woodthorpe Leisure Park is Alison Page, of Peterborough
- Pet Safe winners are: Colin Heaviside of Essex; Liz Tolland of Essex; James Manning of Bedfordshire; Mrs H Woodhouse of Cumbria; Carol Munday of Hampshire; Lucy Albutt of Worcestershire; Jon Mitchell of Dorset; James Dalziel of East Sussex
- Winner of the picnic equipment is Mary O'Grady of Mid-Glamorgan
- Seeds winner is Christine Newman of Cambridgeshire



GOD'S OWN COUNTY

In honour of Yorkshire Day on 1 August, these local place names have been hidden - up, down, across, diagonally, back and forth - in our wordsearch grid. Find them all to discover the name of a famed son of Yorkshire (7, 11) in the unused letters.

R	E	T	S	A	C	N	O	D	W	I
R	A	E	S	N	R	O	H	R	P	E
I	L	B	F	R	H	A	L	O	U	T
C	Y	R	I	I	U	A	C	F	D	A
H	E	I	Y	P	L	M	W	D	S	G
M	L	G	O	O	L	E	I	A	E	O
O	K	H	S	N	R	Y	Y	R	Y	R
N	L	O	L	D	B	K	W	B	B	R
D	I	U	E	S	E	R	E	K	S	A
F	O	S	A	R	S	E	L	B	Y	H
S	H	E	F	F	I	E	L	D	C	E



ASKE
BRADFORD
BRIGHOUSE
DONCASTER
EASBY
FILEY
GOOLE

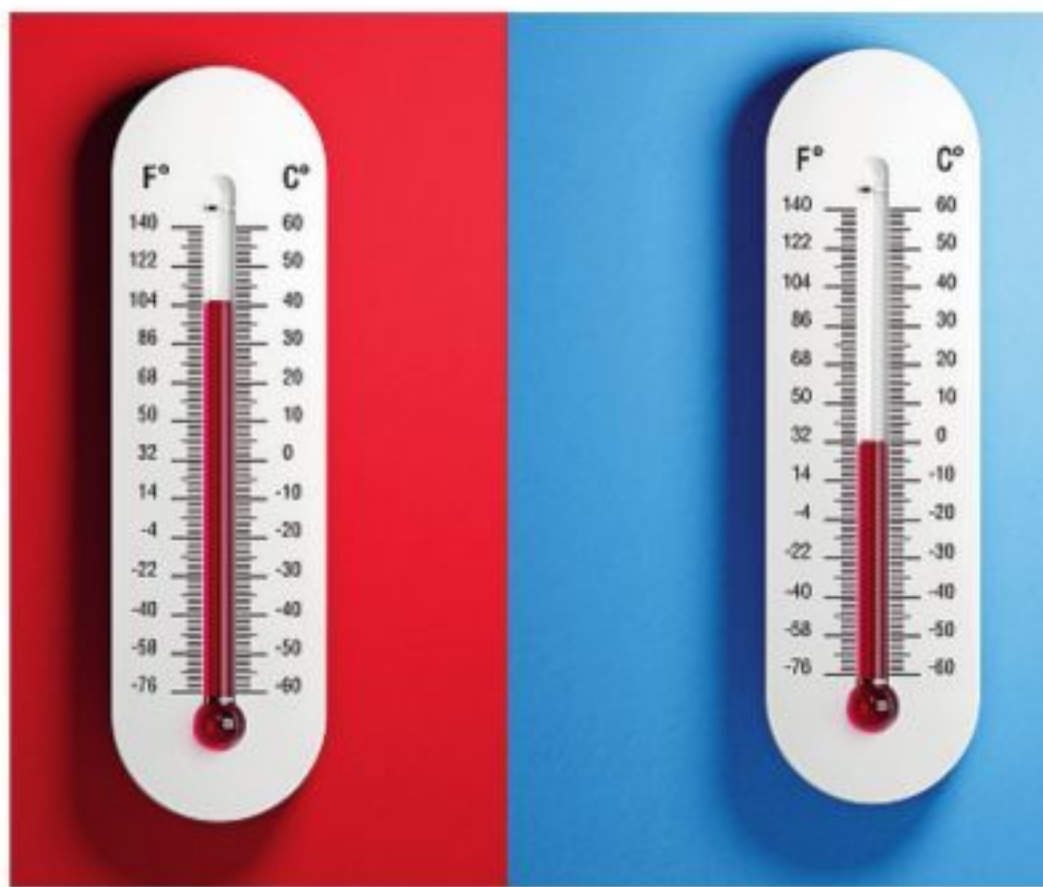
HARROGATE
HORNSEA
HULL
ILKLEY
LEEDS
PUDSEY
REDCAR

RICHMOND
RIPON
SELBY
SHEFFIELD
WELL
YORK

DID YOU KNOW?

August 1st heralds the traditional festival of Lammastide, or Lughnasadh: the beginning of the old Celtic harvest-time season, once celebrated with fairs filled with games, music and dancing. One ancient tradition allowed young courting couples to embark upon a sort of 'trial marriage' for the duration of a fair - around 11 days - and either remain together if they were well suited, or part if their trial hadn't worked out. Not a bad idea...

Watch the weather in early August for an indication of the winter ahead! According to an old saying, 'If the first week in August is unusually warm, the winter will be white and long'. Another old wives' tale suggests that 'If a cold August follows a hot July, it foretells a winter hard and dry'.



If you're lucky enough to hear the 'chirrup' of a cricket this summer, you can calculate the air temperature by the number of 'chirps' it makes. Count how many times you hear the call in eight seconds, then add five, to give you the approximate current temperature in Celsius.



August is the perfect month for seal spotting. West Wales, in particular, is home to around 5,000 Atlantic grey seals - they can often be observed resting on the rocks with their pups at Moylegrove, St Davids and Cemeas Head. Do make sure you keep your distance though - seals are very protective of their pups.

QUEEN OF CRIME

1. What are the first names of the crime writer PD James, born 100 years ago on 3 August 1920?

2. When James was created a life peer in 1991, she sat in the House of Lords representing which political party?

3. Which New Scotland Yard detective hero featured in James's first novel 'Cover Her Face'?



4. This 'Cover Your Face' police officer became the principal character in 10 Anglia TV dramatisations: which actor played the part?

5. In 2011, James published 'Death Comes to Pemberley', a work presented as a sequel to which Jane Austen novel?

6. James lived her later life in which area of Kensington, a name she adopted as her title in the House of Lords?

7. With which British historian did James co-write the 1971 real-life highway murder account 'The Maul and the Pear Tree'?

8. Which female private detective is the protagonist of James's novel 'An Unsuitable Job for a Woman'?



1. Phyllis Dorothy, 2. The Conservatives, 3. Adam Dalgliesh, 4. Roy Marsden, 5. Pride and Prejudice, 6. Holland Park, 7. T.A. Critchley, 8. Cordelia Gray

WORDSEARCH: William Wilberforce

ANSWERS

PHOTOS: ALAMY; ISTOCK; FABER



LETTERS

LETTER OF THE MONTH!



Got it covered...

I celebrated my lockdown birthday recently and decided to challenge myself to reproduce the current front cover... I was inspired to make elderflower cordial for the first time, and I made the fabulous cake which was detailed in the magazine.

The challenge really made my day!

Aine Tierney, by email



Editor replies: Thanks Aine, that's a very impressive re-creation and the strawberry cheesecake looks amazing! And, as I'm a big believer in one good turn deserves another, you've even won this month's star letter prize!



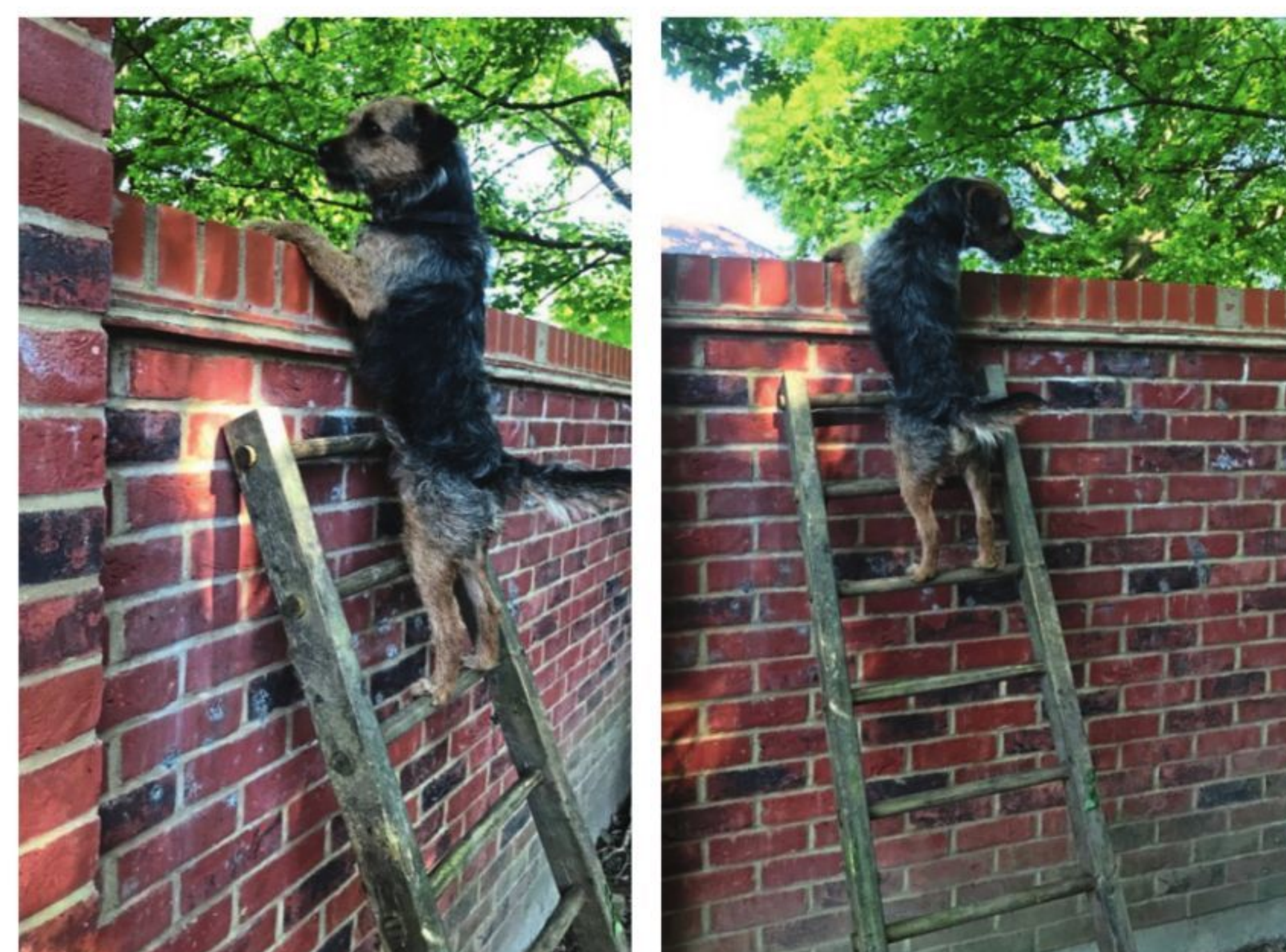
Nature finds a way

These five baby swallows have been with us for a month now above our door, and have settled in nicely. Now it's nearly time for them to fly the nest and we are going to miss their chirps whenever they see us, or feeding time chirps - hinting to their parents they are hungry!

We have had the enjoyment of watching them grow up and learn, from seeing their parents make the nest, to the babies hatching (evidence of egg shell on the floor), to both the parents searching for food and feeding them. It's the final stage now and we are seeing them flapping and fluttering their wings, practising to fly to start their new adventures.

With everything that's going on in the world right now, it's lovely to see nature is carrying on and making it a beautiful place.

Natalie Lewis, by email



Tinker terrier

Our dog Hercules is so full of character and doesn't like to be left out of anything... He cries to have the ladder put up so he can scan the neighbourhood!

Muriel Froydenlund, by email

Caption competition

This month's caption competition celebrates the feline predilection for sleeping in the unlikeliest of places - but can you think of a witty caption of no more than 20 words? The best caption wins this Sophie Allport apron - perfect for a bit of summer cooking. Send your captions to: martin.stanhope@nfu.org.uk. Closing date is 14 August 2020. Please note, we will publish the winner of the July edition in the next issue.



June's caption winner is Aileen Cockshott with: "Sales of our new helium-enriched dog food are soaring!"



Caught on camera

Nature certainly seems to have benefited from the past few months with insects and birds flourishing. I have had sparrows and starlings nesting in my roof which gave me something to watch as the busy parents went back and forth with food for their brood.



Keeping our spirits up is very much in our thoughts during this difficult time and, I for one, use my camera to help with this. When taking pictures I'm thinking of nothing else except what I'm seeing through the lens. I've sowed part of my garden with wildflower seeds and look forward to when they bloom and I can bring this wildlife closer still.

Lisa Wilson, by email

The people's poll

If you've had a BBQ this week, or are planning one - what's the best part?



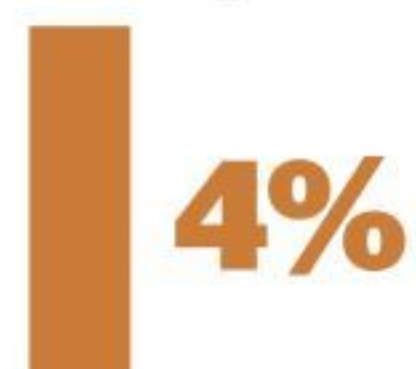
Delicious grilled meat



Eating al fresco



Tasty side dishes



The alcohol!

WIN our star letter prize!

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RURAL WISDOM AND REVIEWS

46 Feathered focus - poor sitters and the Modern Game breed

48 The Good Life guide to garden hens

50 Buzz from the Beehive - part three of the beekeeping guide

53 The Dogfather, plus, Day in the Life of a Vet

54 Dog breeds of Britain and Ireland - the Lurcher

56 Nature Magpie

57 Gardening with Pippa Greenwood

58 Animal nutrition - give your piglets the best start

59 Equine focus - laminitis

60 Powering the rural economy - unlocking the potential of rural Britain

62 Business tips and tricks

63 How to... preserve flowers

65 Smallholder view with Clare Hunt

66 View from the Farm with Joe Stanley

69 Working 9-5ish

70 NFU Mutual helps you get back on the road

72 The Countryside Guide to... soil

77 Equine Tested - the latest horse products on test

78 Tested - delicious British cheeses, tried and tested

83 Read it - this month's six favourite books

84 Wear it - the pick of the month's rural fashion





Andy Cawthray is a writer who lives in Shropshire where he has bred poultry for many years. He also runs the website chickenstreet.co.uk

Did you know?

Did you know that you don't need to turn eggs during incubation in order to have some hatch, but what you will find is that the hatch rate is significantly higher if you do.

The turning of the egg prevents the embryo from sticking to the side of the shell (this will stop the chick from being able to move into the hatching position when the eggs have reached term), and ensures an even temperature is achieved within the egg. It also improves and refreshes the contact between the embryonic membrane and the nutrient-rich albumen within the egg.

"Ask Andy"

I have a number of hens who go broody each year, but I've yet to let them rear a clutch as I'm worried about them sitting for the duration. I'm planning on letting one sit this year, but what back-up plans would you suggest just in case she doesn't sit for the full period?

There are occasions when a broody hen may abandon her nest and not return. This could be due to a number of reasons such as predator risk, excessive external parasite infestation, constant disturbance (by the keeper or by other chickens in the flock), or simply because the hen is either inexperienced or of a breed that is not known for sitting. As such, the keeper needs to be prepared.

The viability of the eggs from an abandoned nest can depend upon the external temperature, how quickly the eggs have cooled, and at what stage in the incubation process they are. In general, the closer the eggs are to their hatch date, the more likely they are to survive a period of non-incubation.

Should a hen abandon a nest, then the keeper will need to either move the eggs to an incubator, or place them under an already-broody hen, who is not currently incubating a clutch or has only recently been set on eggs. If it's the latter case, then the newly-set eggs should be replaced with the due-to hatch eggs.



Feathered focus

Breed Name: Modern Game
Region of origin: UK

Profile: This breed came into being shortly after the ban on cock fighting occurred in the UK in 1849. Attention diverted from fighting qualities and to show 'looks' and, as a consequence, the breed has rather accentuated aspects with long slender legs and an elongated neck. The feathering is also more profuse than other tight-feathered breeds, which, combined with the vast array of plumage colours, makes this breed much more attuned to exhibition and show status.

Behaviour and upkeep: The Modern Game will become trusting towards its keeper, and they're also more tolerant towards each other, and within a mixed flock, which makes accommodating them much simpler. They're quite hardy and cope well with most climates, needing no particular special care. The hens are poor layers, laying only for a few months a year. They can go broody, but their shape

and tight feathering doesn't make for an ideal sitter, and, as such, they can be a challenging breed to rear, better suited to the experienced poultry keeper.

Plumage/Colours: Black, Blue, White, Blue/ Red, Silver Blue, Lemon Blue, Birchen, Black/ Red, Brown/ Red, Duckwing (Gold, Silver), Pyle, Wheaten

Particulars:

Eyes: Dependent upon plumage

Comb: Single, small, finely serrated

Feet & legs: Featherless, colour dependent upon plumage

Weights:

Cock weight

Large Fowl 7-9lb (3.20-4.10kg)

Bantam 20-22oz (570-620g)

Hen weight

Large Fowl 5-7lb (2.25-3.20kg)

Bantam 16-18oz (450-510g)

Egg production - Low

Egg Colour - Tinted

Classification - Hard Feather



Chicken Nugget

During the hot summer months, it's essential that chickens have access to shade. Whilst they do cope with warm weather, they don't have sweat glands and thermo-regulation is achieved by using heat transfer through the comb, wattles, and nasal cavity. Egg production will drop if the temperature is above 27 degrees (80.6F) for too long.

Chickens will also eat less, move and grow less during very warm weather, and may give the appearance of drooping as they drop their wings away from the body in an attempt to increase air movement and body heat loss.

Drinkers also need to be washed out daily and refilled with fresh water, particularly in the case of those made from clear or misted plastic. When exposed to a long period of sunlight, these drinkers can quickly develop algal growth in the water. If, however, you use metal drinkers, be aware that these will heat up the water when sat in direct sunlight. The best rule of thumb is... the thumb - if the water feels warm to the touch, then refresh it.



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A few hens for the garden?

Andy Cawthray looks at the best way to free-range your chickens at home

IT WAS THE THOUGHT of keeping a flock of hens at home to provide fresh, high-welfare eggs for the family that started me keeping chickens more than 20 years ago.

It's a story that many chicken keepers have in common, but, for a number of those keepers, the chickens live in a fixed run somewhere down the bottom of the garden, often hidden from sight, because experience has taught them: free-ranging chickens and gardens don't mix.

This is not an untrue statement; chickens and gardens, on occasions, don't mix, but only in the same way that dogs or children and gardens don't mix – but it's not the fault of the dog or children, just as it's not the fault of the chickens, it's mostly down to the way you mix them.

To me, a free-ranging flock in the garden adds to the outdoor environment, making an already enjoyable space into one with even more character. It also means my flock have much more room than they would if confined to a fixed run or coop where, in reality, the flock is likely to be of a stock density higher than that of commercial free rangers. Instead, by giving my flock the run of the



FREE-RANGING: Garden chickens can make an outdoor space even more enjoyable

garden, I'm managing to achieve more of what I was aiming for.

The key is in the planning before you rush into getting a flock of hens. This initial bit of thought will avoid you finding your flock rampaging through your garden and turning your once well-tended borders into a building site.

In fact, if you plan carefully, the flock can become useful gardeners in themselves. They help in the control of pests, eat weeds, mow the lawn, compost green waste and improve soil condition. Their 'enthusiasm' does need some tempering though, as there's likely to be some areas you wish to keep them from at certain times of the year – such as the vegetable patch in the spring and summer.

This though, just needs a shift in your thinking, for example, rather than cage the birds, cage the fruit and vegetables to keep them safe from the attentions of the hens. Actively managing the areas your flock can free-range in helps, too. You don't have to give them the full run of the garden and creative use of hazel hurdles and fencing means you can ensure the flock is in the right areas at the right time.



For example, ranging the flock in your kitchen garden area prior to sowing or planting out in the spring, and after cropping in the late autumn, can help clear and fertilise the ground for the growing season ahead.

Only letting the birds into the flower borders in the summer after the plants have established themselves minimises any damage, just as running the birds through the soft fruit areas or orchard in the autumn helps in clearing up windfall that would otherwise rot and potentially cause disease. An actively foraging hen will also find more of her own food and eat less of the feed you have to buy in.

Remember, your garden is an ecosystem for which the balance, to many extents, is under your control. If that ecosystem is to remain healthy, then you need to observe and understand the way it works. Adding an appropriately-sized flock of chickens introduces another aspect to the ecosystem, but one which is most definitely within your control and under your management.

Making sure the flock complements and contributes towards the balance of the garden is key, and stocking too heavily, or ranging too intensively, will inevitably lead to problems that will have you cooping them up in a fixed run somewhere behind the shed.

Getting the right breed

Keep the flock size suitable for the space you have. A 25m² to 35m² garden space would suit five-to-eight average-sized chickens, which, in turn, should easily keep the average family in eggs with sufficient surplus to sell to cover upkeep costs.

Just as the number of chickens that your garden will cope with requires consideration, so does the type of breed you wish to have free-ranging.

It may come as a surprise, but it's the light layer breed types that can be the more 'active' gardeners and rip through your well-tended borders and lawns in a matter of days.

It's in their nature to forage extensively and so it's quite possible that those who run into problems free-ranging chickens in their garden are possibly the owners of layer hybrids such as warrens or leghorn-crosses, or pure breeds designed for high volume egg laying.

Obviously, a lot will depend on precisely how much space you have in your garden, but careful selection of the type of chicken, be it bantam or large fowl, heavy or light, will play an important part in the success of the mix.

The characteristics to look for in the ideal chicken for the garden are temperament, centre of gravity, and legs. This might sound a little scientific, but really it's just applying a bit of common sense.

Docile breeds of chicken tend to be slow and deliberate in their movements, however some of the most docile breeds tend to be the biggest. Brahmas, Cochins, Dorkings and Orpingtons are all well-known for their size, but also for their generally laid-back attitude, and if your garden

Breeds that work well free-ranging in a garden

Little

- Sabelpoot
- Pekin
- Nankin
- Japanese
- Silkie (Bantam)
- Modern Game (Bantam)
- German Langshan (Bantam)

And Large

- Brahma
- Cochin
- Dorking
- Orpington
- Silkie



TOP: A Silkie bantam ABOVE LEFT: A German Langshan bantam ABOVE RIGHT: A Dorking

space is large enough for these giants, then they can work really rather well.

They also tend to have a low centre of gravity, which means they tend to 'roll' when moving and don't often (if at all) move with any pace. It's true that the dust baths they make are big enough to lose a small dog in, but, in general, their attitude to foraging in the garden tends to match their attitude towards life, ie. laid-back.

On the other hand, breeds such as Modern Game and German Langshans, and, in particular, the bantam versions of them, work well, too. They have a very high centre of gravity and incredibly long legs which, although this doesn't hinder the birds' ability to forage, it does mean they forage in a somewhat different manner to those well-balanced light layers.

At the other end of the leg-length scale are the likes of the Pekin, Japanese, Sabelpoots, Nankins etc. These types of bantams tend to have the low centre of gravity, short legs, and frequently a calm temperament. Couple this to their true bantam diminutive stature and it means they are unlikely to make a mess of any garden.

With a bit of planning about where the flock can go in the garden along with how many members of the flock your garden can cope with, and then, by picking the right breed, there's no reason why you can't have some feather foragers free-ranging and adding interest and value to your outdoor space. This can provide a double bonus of adding a new dynamic: a useful garden assistant, plus a few fresh eggs for the family. 🐔



Buzz from the Beehive

Part three of **Simon Cavill's** guide to the noble art of beekeeping

Getting the buzz - so what do I do now?

Over the previous two articles, I've given a brief introduction to the wonderful world of honeybees and beekeeping that many people seem to find fascinating.

As mentioned before, honey has been prized by humans as one of the oldest, most dense energy sources for tens of thousands of years. In addition, honey, beeswax, and especially propolis have been used as wound dressings, skin ailment treatments and a general antibiotic for almost as long and are still being used and recommended by the NHS today.

Some beekeepers keep bees solely for the joy of watching and working with them, and, in return, the bees can act as a kind of restful therapy for those with issues related to PTSD, stress, anxiety and depression.

Many ex-military staff find the art of beekeeping therapeutic and calming, as it directly connects the beekeeper to the natural world and gives them a calm focus around the bees. So, let's get into the practicalities of keeping bees through a typical year.



A HOBBY FOR ALL: Beekeepers come in all shapes, sizes and ages

Beekeeping throughout the year

For most of us, the active beekeeping season runs from March to the end of September. During this time, we visit the colonies on a cycle every 7-9 days on a warm, dry day. We inspect the bees to check on the colonies' progress and look for signs of any disease.

Plan for about 2-4 hours of beekeeping activities a week at these times, depending on your experience, access to a mentor and the number of hives. In general terms, for us in the UK, the beekeeping year looks like this:

January-February: During the coldest months, the bees will stay safe and warm inside the hives consuming pollen and honey gathered the previous spring/summer. We clear away any snow blocking the entrances and spend a few hours planning the rest of the year and preparing equipment for later in the spring. About 2-3 hours of effort per month.

March: The bees will start to forage for pollen from the early spring flowers, and the Queen bee will dramatically increase her egg-laying for the next generation of workers to emerge in six weeks in step with the explosion of spring flowers and

blossom. Once we get a spell of dry weather with daytimes at 15C or more, we can conduct our first inspection and continue to feed any hives looking low on stores. We start adding honey-storing super boxes to the bigger colonies to give them room to expand. About 4-6 hours this month, depending on the weather.

April-May: Things start getting busy, and we are now looking for signs of Queen cells being formed at each inspection, along with any signs of disease or the impact of Varroa mites, which may require treatment. Male drone bees hatch ready to mate with any early virgin Queens. Good colonies can expand rapidly, so we add more super



SUMMER SWARM: Call-outs to collect swarms are part of the beekeeper's routine

boxes as each colony grows and may split bigger hives into two colonies to prevent unwanted swarms later. We may be called out to collect local swarms and re-house them. Don't forget to share any family news or gossip with the bees - they're very good at keeping secrets! About 6-8 hours this month, plus swarm collection and re-housing efforts.

June: Longer days mean more time for the bees to forage and, inside the hives, the population of bees reach their peak. Start moving previously split colonies into full-size hives. Still watching for disease and signs of swarming, which will need to be acted on quickly. Honey is coming into the hive at quite a rate, and there may even be a few full supers of spring honey ready for harvesting! About 6-8 hours this month.

July: Many nectar-bearing trees come into blossom along with blackberry and other main honey-bearing flowers. Make sure hives have enough supers to cope, as this will help reduce the swarming impulse. Still collecting and re-housing swarms, although, by this stage, we are now passing them onto to new beekeepers, as our apiaries are full of newly-collected swarm colonies! About 6-8 hours this month.

Pests, pathogens and diseases

Like all living things, honeybees have their own pests, parasites and diseases. Keeping colonies healthy throughout the year is the beekeeper's main focus, and there will be times when urgent action is required to prevent the colony from dying out completely.

The weekly inspections should ensure that any signs of key pathogens, such as European and American Foulbrood, can be seen and tested for, as any outbreak is serious and needs reporting to the authorities in a similar fashion to foot-and-mouth disease to prevent the pathogen spreading to other colonies in the area.

Thankfully, it's not that common, unlike Varroa mites, which are now present across the country, having been introduced by accident from their native Asia in the 1990s. There are various treatments, but we find vaporising oxalic acid the best method for killing mites without hurting the bees; it's something we can use at any time of the year without affecting the quality of the honey or beeswax.

The Asian hornet is another unwelcome pest that arrived as a single colony on an import of pottery in Southern France in 2004. Since then, it has spread across France, Spain, Italy and Germany, attacking and wiping out entire honeybee colonies which have no natural defence for this imported threat.

Several colonies have been found, reported and destroyed, mainly across Southern England and all beekeepers remain on high alert for this new invader.

August: Most of the honey harvest is inside the hives, and most main-crop flowers are over. Populations of bees inside colonies start falling fast as there is relatively little to forage. Swarming season is mostly over, and we will harvest our honey at the end of the month, making sure each colony has plenty of stores left to see them through until next spring. Hive entrances are reduced right down to prevent robbing by wasps and other colonies. About 4-6 hours, plus a holiday for the beekeeper before harvest!

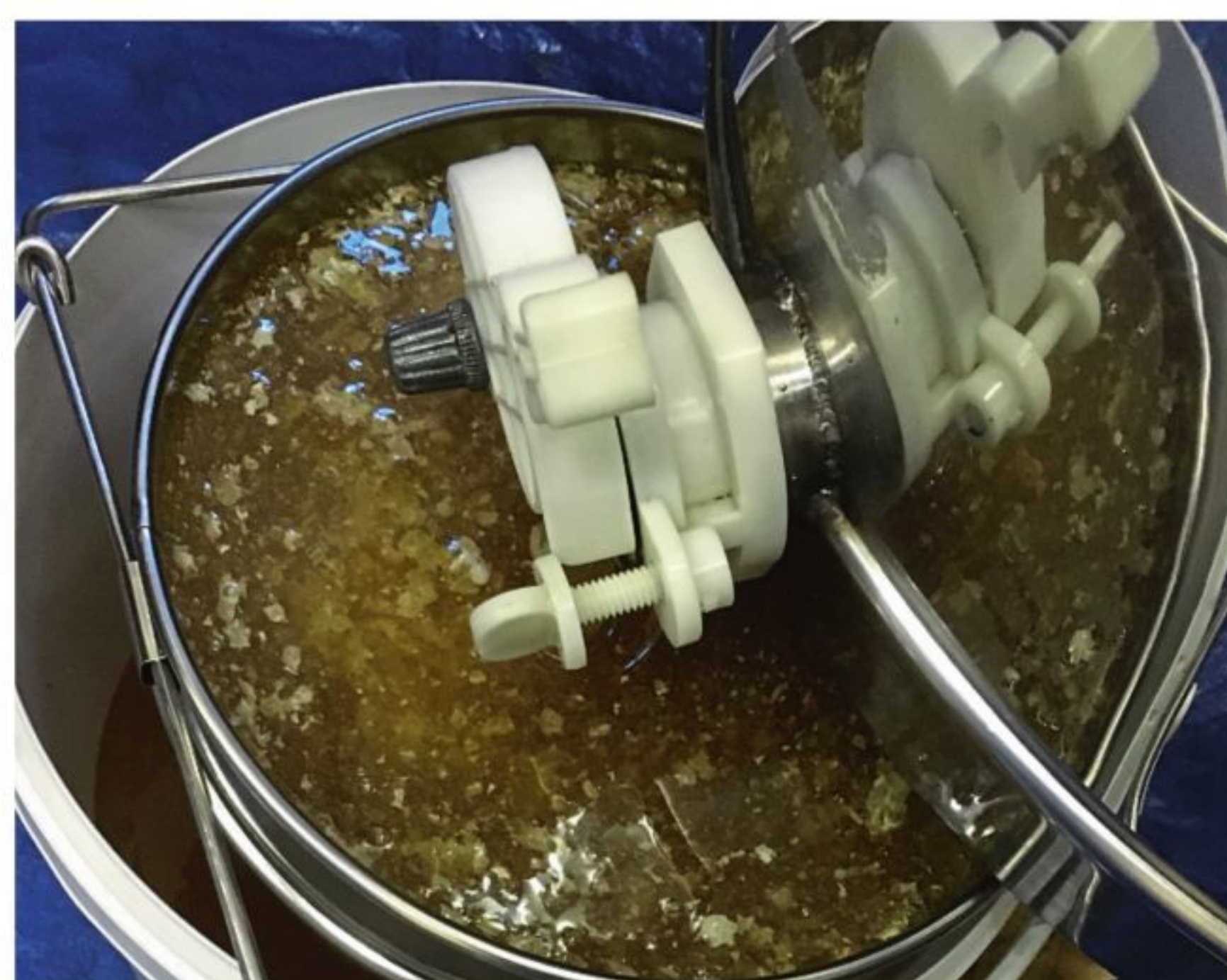
September/October: Any remaining drones are pushed out of the hives to die as they are no longer needed. Bees forage from the last of the flowering plants, especially ivy. We may merge or feed weaker colonies to ensure they are big and strong enough to get through winter. We usually treat for Varroa mites at this time and start strapping down hives ready for any autumn storms. About 3-4 hours needed this month.

November-December: The bees stay in the hive as the weather cools. We finish processing and bottling this year's honey harvest. Inspect the apiary after any bad weather to ensure the hives are intact. Then it's important to clean and check all the equipment ready for the next season. About 1-2 hours this month. Enjoy Christmas and don't forget to visit the bees and say thanks for all their hard work!



Harvesting honey

A robust, well-established colony can produce a harvest of anything from 30lb to 80lbs (14 to 36Kg)



TOP: The extractor spins out honey which collects at the bottom

ABOVE: The honey is initially filtered as it leaves the extractor

per hive, or more in a good year. However, this varies depending on many factors such as the weather, available forage, colony development etc. This equates to 40-100 jars of honey that, at £4-6 each, will rapidly sell out once the word gets out locally. While you may not turn a profit, it certainly helps to contribute to your expenses and will buy you lots of local friends!

So, can I earn a living?

Like any other form of farming, your income is totally dependent on your annual harvest, so it's a risky enterprise at best. Here in the UK, we have around 27,000 amateur beekeepers with an average of 3-4 hives each and only 300-400 professional bee farmers, most of whom use beekeeping as a secondary income. There are a handful of bee farmers operating more than 1,000 hives, with each employee managing around 250 hives, but it's not an easy profession to make a living from and, like other forms of agriculture, diversification is key.

The good news is that a new generation of apprentice bee farmers are coming through with industry sponsorship and support to help them start and grow viable businesses. There are also a number of military veterans coming into the profession supported by the MoD and related charities, so the future of professional beekeeping looks positive.

The easiest option is clearly to start as an amateur beekeeper and enjoy your bees, rather than attempting to make a living from it with the stress that imposes. So, if you are thinking about beekeeping for whatever reason, contact your local association via the BBKA.org.uk website and see what it's all about. You won't regret it! 🐝



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A day in the life of a vet

Cystitis in cats

Cystitis is very common in cats, and, although rarely life-threatening, it can be very distressing and uncomfortable.

Cystitis simply means that the lining of the bladder is inflamed and this can be due to a variety of causes.

The most common reason is stress-related cystitis; some cats, in particular, have a decreased ability to cope with environmental stress. Cats can be subtle creatures and the source of stress isn't always obvious. Common stressors can include building work or a new pet or baby, but, for some cats, even a small change in daily routine can trigger cystitis.

Risk factors include being overweight, a sedentary lifestyle, eating a dry diet, a multi-cat household, and having restricted or no access to the outside.

Signs of cystitis include straining to pee, frequent trips to the litter tray with only small amounts of urine being passed and some cats will urinate in unusual places, such as in the bath. They sometimes can seem restless and unsettled or may cry out when they pee. The symptoms will cause your vet to be suspicious of cystitis and a physical examination will further support this as the bladder is typically small and uncomfortable.

When it comes to treating stress-related cystitis, your vet will prescribe some medication to help with the pain and discomfort. Other important factors are trying to minimise stress. Supplements, such as zylkene and feliway can help along with supplements to help support the bladder wall lining. Trying to increase your cat's water intake is important; feeding a wet diet, and adding water to their food.

Cystitis typically resolves a few days after starting treatment, but, if your cat is having recurrent bouts, then your vet may suggest further investigations to look for other potential causes, such as bladder stones or a urinary tract infection.



Rachel Caplan is a small animal vet, based in Bedfordshire. Visit: bonessvets.co.uk



The Dogfather

Humans aren't logical

"May I say that I have not thoroughly enjoyed serving with humans. I find their illogic and foolish emotions a constant irritant."

So spoke Star Trek's Mr Spock, but it could easily have been the USS Enterprise's mascot dog, if such an alien creature existed. Dogs, like Vulcans (apparently), are very logical creatures. That's not to say dogs don't 'do' emotions, it's just that we don't fully understand them.

I realise I sound like a Trekkie, which I'm not. I grew up in the right era to be a Star Trek fan, indeed most of my schoolmates were, but it didn't make sense to me. They had model starships, but all I wanted were Matchbox cars. As far as I could tell, nobody in 1970s Selby ever owned a starship, but most families had a car. I didn't want a model Ford Corsair, I wanted Mustangs, Camaros and anything else with flames down the side and whizzy wheels. Aspirational, but relatable, you see? As far as I was concerned, Star Trek was just not logical (Captain).

Dogs, on the other hand, are. What often gets in the way of the human/ dog interface is our tendency to be too emotional when it doesn't serve either of us. I'm not saying we shouldn't love our dogs and show affection - far from it. It's just that sometimes emotions, with their innate ability to cloud things, are, well... inconvenient.

Let me tell you about a little Dachshund called Fritz. He feared visitors and barked non-stop until they left. He protested my presence in his living room with a piercing bark that belied his size. I couldn't tell him off, because he already thought I was scary and that would prove his point; but if I tried to appease him, he'd most likely hate the interaction too: a classic Catch-22. After 10 minutes of barking and stoicism (about my usual limit), I decided we needed a Plan B. And maybe some paracetamol.

"Will he listen if you tell him off?", I shouted across to the owner, hoping against hope. "Oh yes, sure. But only for a couple of minutes," she yelled back.

This was music to my beleaguered ears. Two minutes were plenty. Plan B was set: get him to stop, and then praise him for being a good boy. I'd have to coach the lady through the praise, but I'd cross that bridge when we got to it, I reasoned. Fritz's owner turned to him, put on her best schoolmistress face, and delivered a stern message: "No!"

And that was that, amazingly, there was silence. For the first time since I'd been in the house, he stopped barking. Right now he was being a good boy. But then... "BAD BOY!"

This was not in the plan. Before I could stop her, she continued unleashing her frustration on the quiet dog, not that he understood a word. "This nice man..." she shouted in his face, wagging a finger behind herself toward me, "has come here to help you, and all YOU can do is sit there and bark your head off! You bad, BAD boy!"

Then she slumped back in the sofa, seemingly contented, turned to me and said, "Okay. Now what?"

It had all gone so right, and then so wrong, right in front of my eyes. Poor old Fritz was confused.

"What just happened here?" he must have been thinking, "I tried to get rid of the intruder and you said nothing for ages, then you shouted at me. So, I was quiet, to please you, and then you shouted at me for being quiet. Humans are illogical!"

And with that, the little dog, more scared than before, redoubled his efforts, barking like a dog possessed.

"See...?" shouted his owner, throwing her hands in the air, "He's... he's..."

"Illogical...?" I offered.



Graeme Hall is recognised as one of Britain's top trainers. He's trained more than 4,000 dogs of all breeds, including some for the Hollywood film industry. For more information and free dog advice, check out: DogfatherTraining.co.uk



Dog breeds of Britain and Ireland

THE LURCHER

Whilst the purist might argue Lurchers are not an 'official' breed, such is their popularity in rural Britain, I felt this 'designer cross-breed' had to be included in this column, **writes Ellie Kelly**. A Lurcher is a cross between a working dog, such as a collie or terrier and a sighthound, like a greyhound or wolfhound. This cross means they should combine brains with speed.

HISTORY

The Lurcher is unique to Britain and Ireland and, whilst there is no confirmed origin, they seem to have been around for many hundreds of years. In the Middle Ages only nobility were allowed to own a pure-bred sighthound such as a Greyhound, Deerhound, Wolfhound, Whippet or Saluki and the punishment for a commoner who was found to have one of these, was often death.

It is thought that cross-bred puppies were bred by accident or possibly by design for commoners and often gypsies. They were used mainly for hunting and poaching rabbits, hare, and other small game.

The name Lurcher is thought to be from the French Middle English, 'lurch', meaning to lurk or remain in place furtively. It has also been suggested that the word 'lurcher' is from the Romani word for thief.

Later, there is evidence of Lurchers being used as messenger dogs in both World Wars. The modern lurcher has left behind its old image of disrepute and is regarded as a fantastic family dog and are still used as both sport and working dogs. When crossed with a Border Collie, they also make excellent sheep herding dogs.

CHARACTERISTICS

Lurchers come in a huge variety of sizes and shapes, from the small Whippet type to the large Deerhound look, and a host of sizes in between. Their coats vary just as much from smooth to rough-haired



and throw up just about any colour dogs can come in. They tend to have long lithe bodies and a rangey appearance. Their heads are noble with long, elegant noses, giving off an air of sophistication.

'Tried and tested' Lurcher ingredients include the Saluki, Whippet, Greyhound, Deerhound, Bedlington Terrier and Border Collie. Breeders generally agree that the less sighthound there is, the easier they are to train.

While they live for hunting and running out in the open, they also love a bit of comfort. So, if you are verging on the soft side of dog ownership, beds and sofas may be required. They are very sensitive dogs and, whilst they can be aloof and difficult to train, they are also extremely intelligent and loyal.

Many owners, however, say they are not particularly great with cats. Although, as with any breed, if they grow up with them as puppies, this can often be managed.

THE REAL STORY: William Fox-Pitt and Molly

William Fox-Pitt is a prolific three-day event rider with three Olympic medals and two Badminton titles. He's married to Alice Plunkett, a well-known presenter on ITV Racing. The couple have four children and a great number of animals on their farm in Dorset. William has owned Lurchers for around 25 years and it all started with a rescued Lurcher called Basil.

"I didn't set out to get a Lurcher and was drawn by the case, rather than the breed. Basil had a broken leg so we were giving him a home but I became very fond of him. Then, when I got together with my wife, Alice, fellow event rider Beanie Sturgiss gave us a puppy as a "getting together" present, which we called Molly. She was a typical Lurcher, very loving, but also very independent and self-assured. What I love about Lurchers is that they are so relaxed in their own skin and deal with whatever comes their way. When you were around she was very happy, when you weren't, she wasn't that bothered.

"As with all my dogs, she loved being out at competitions and joined me in the horsebox to every UK event I competed in. Molly became a fanatical hunter and, sadly, that was her undoing. She



chased a cat over the road and was hit by a car. Although she was 14 by then, so I think it was a good end.

"We bred several litters from Molly and ended up keeping a daughter called Turtle and then a granddaughter called Poppy. These were our two most recent Lurchers, both of whom we sadly recently lost, within a month of each other.

"Lurchers are great for my lifestyle, which is very much outdoors, either at home or competing. They don't take up too much space, or make too much mess. They suit a chaotic life and that's why they suit the horse life and are very popular with riders.

"When you have animals, you have to get used to losing them but it was very sad. We are now looking for one from those origins. We are quite fussy though - it can't be too big or too small and I like them smooth-coated. Getting four dogs and four children in the car and the lorry was always a tight fit, but they are amazing with children and would never snap.

"We hope to find the right one soon, to fill the void. There was nothing better than when my two lurchers came out galloping with the horses. On those days they would do around 10 miles galloping, with several lots of horses, and never gave up until we had finished."



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Nature Magpie with Dan Allen

Dr Daniel Allen is a unique commentator on nature-society interactions. He is also the author of *The Nature Magpie*, out now in paperback (Icon, £8.99/ £7.99 eBook).



Joyful water-life and death

On 12 June 1928 a little-known author called Henry Williamson leapt to fame when he was awarded the Hawthornden Prize for his 1927 book *Tarka the Otter: His joyful water-life and death in the country of two rivers*. As well as being awarded £100, this honour generated instant recognition.

In the days following the announcement, the author and Tarka became the subject of national interest. Williamson received high praise in the press. Many newspapers recited passages from John Galsworthy's presentation speech. *The Times*, for instance, wrote that 'Williamson is the finest and most intimate living interpreter of the drama of wildlife.'

The story of *Tarka the Otter* (1927) follows the life of a young otter on the rivers Torridge and Taw in Devon. Williamson describes the habits and experiences of the animal in detail, whilst avoiding sentimentalism. On his two-year journey from birth to death, readers see Tarka learn to swim, regularly searching for food, interacting with other otters, having encounters with wild animals, witnessing the changing seasons, and, of course, facing the recurring threat of humans and hounds.

In the opening chapter, Williamson introduces a female otter, pregnant with Tarka and his two sisters, and the presence of a 'dreaded' 'scent':



'She stood rigid. The hair on her back was raised... Mingled with the flower odours, which were unpleasant to her, was the taint that had given her a sudden shock... The taint most dreaded by the otters... of the Two Rivers - the scent of Deadlock, the great pied hound with the belving tongue, leader of the pack.'

Throughout the book, Tarka, like his mother before him, is confronted by the 'dreaded taint' of Deadlock. The story ends with a vivid description of Tarka being hunted for 10 hours. Having nearly escaped the bloodthirsty pack, he comes face to face with his nemesis: 'Deadlock saw the small brown head, and bayed in triumph as he jumped down the bank. He bit the head and lifted the otter high, flung him about and fell into the water with him. They saw the broken head look up beside Deadlock, heard the cry of Ic-yang! As Tarka bit into his throat, and then the hound was sinking with the otter into the deep water... they waited and watched, until the body of Deadlock arose, drowned and heavy... And while they stood there silently, a great bubble rose out of the depths, and broke, and as they watched, another bubble shook the surface, and broke; and there was a third bubble in the sea-going waters, and nothing more.'

With this dramatic climax, Williamson not only comments on the harshness of life and nature, but also positions Tarka as a heroic figure.

Williamson's portrayal of the otter was based on knowledge. From 1924 he chose to follow his local hunt, the Cheriton Otter Hounds, to gather information. His descriptions of otter hunters were informed by these experiences; Deadlock was also based on the pack's leading hound, Dreamy.

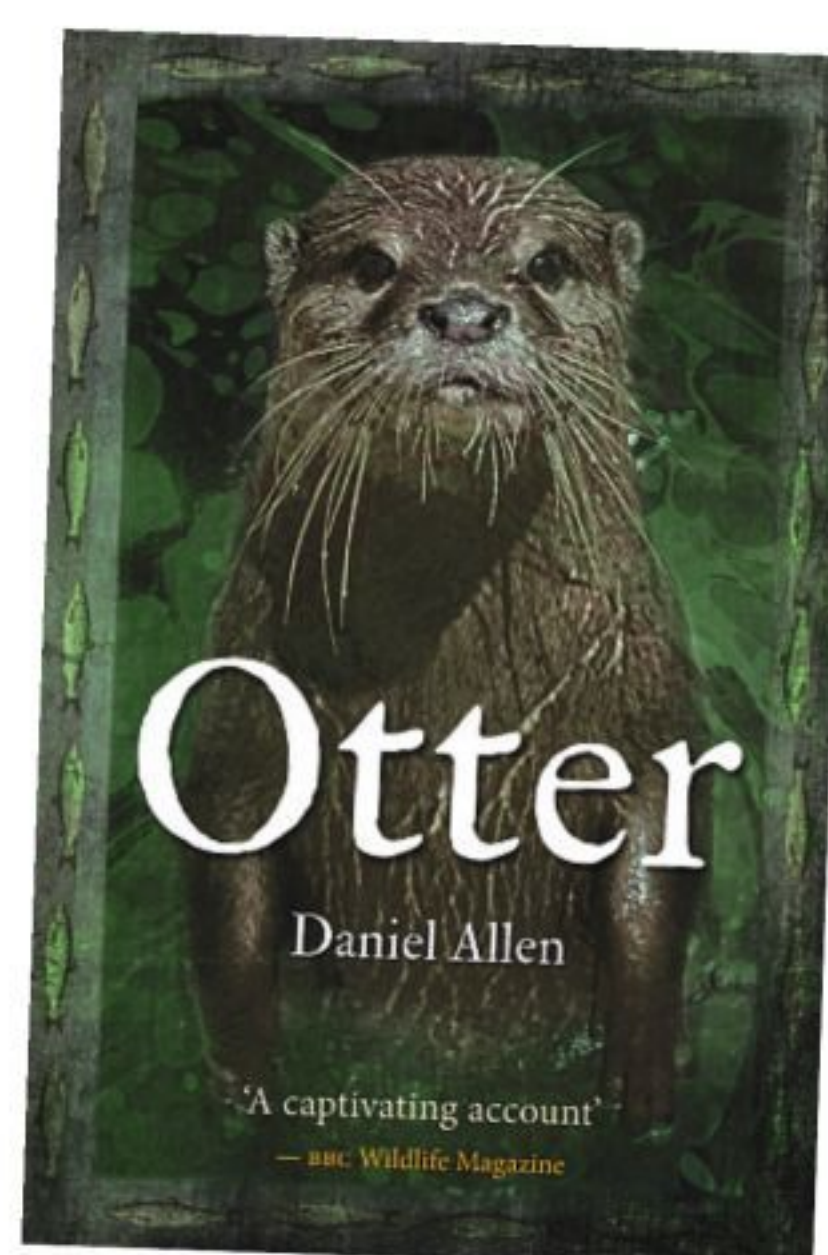
Team Tarka

For most readers the story makes a lasting impression. British poet Ted Hughes, for example, was fascinated by Tarka. Having first read the book at the age of 11, he turned the pages of little else for a year after. "It entered into me and gave shape and words to my world, as no book has ever done since," explained Hughes. It later proved an inspiration for his poetry. The poem 'An Otter' features in his 1960 collection *Lupercal*.

Personally, as a six-year-old, I was given the chance to pick a VHS tape from my local video store and I chose the film version of *Tarka the Otter*, assuming it to be some kind of Disney-like story. How wrong I was! It was full of blood, death, misery and trauma. It really affected me. Watching otters being hunted on screen at such an impressionable age ignited my childhood otter obsession. My emotional

connection with the ill-fated Tarka ran deep and, in many ways, has been the inspiration for much of my academic life.

When shortlisted in the Arts and Humanities Research Council's (AHRC) search for the UK's favourite nature writing, it seemed unfair for this 'lost book' not to have someone defending it - Henry Williamson had died in 1977 and sadly few of the younger generation had heard of Tarka.



In an age of social media and online advocacy, I set up #TeamTarka on social media to promote the book, helping Tarka win the number two spot in 2018. Chris Packham's *Fingers in the Sparkle Jar* (2016) was voted favourite.

● Daniel Allen's new book *Otter* (2020) is available this month.

Gardening with Pippa Greenwood

Pippa Greenwood is a trained botanist and a regular presenter on Radio 4's *Gardeners' Question Time*.
Visit: pippagreenwood.com



As the summer has progressed, variable as it has been, most of us have spent more time than before in our own private green space. The great thing about your garden at this time of year is that it can often be transformed into an outdoor dining area – a place to sit, eat and contemplate.



Ornamentals

● It's easy for flowerbeds and borders to be slipping downhill at this time of year, so do everything you can to keep the plants looking as good as they can. Regular deadheading, and promptly too, will reduce the risk of grey mould developing and often encourages more buds and flowers to form. Use snippers, scissors or secateurs, depending on the toughness of the stem, but do it regularly. On plants such as lavender, a serious haircut as soon as the flowers have faded will also help to keep the plant good and compact, and prevent it becoming woody and leggy.



● Adding in a few plants, which look wonderful in late summer, is a great way to add pizzazz to less-than-perfect flower borders. You can't go wrong with the classics such as Japanese or hybrid anemones, some of which are mentioned below. But a visit to your local nursery or garden centre at this time of year will provide plenty to tempt you and ensure the flower borders at home look even better!

Edibles

● As herbs should be growing speedily now, take the opportunity to freeze some – chopped herbs freeze well in ice cube trays when just covered with water – but don't forget to label them first. Once frozen, they can be might hard to identify!

● As conditions get warmer, blossom end rot is likely to develop on tomatoes, especially those growing in containers. You'll notice a blackish, leathery, and often slightly sunken area developing at the flower end or base of the fruits, usually first appearing when they are still green. It's not infectious, but caused by a lack of calcium in the fruits – because the plants cannot take up what they need if the compost is too dry. It looks horrible, but if the fruits have ripened, I just cut off the damaged bit and cook the rest.



● Some apples, especially early varieties, may be becoming ripe now, so check them regularly to see when it's time to pick them. As a guide, if you cup the fruit in your hand and gently rotate it, if it comes away after a single turn, it is ready.

Gardenwide

● I'd not suggest creating a new lawn just yet, it's too early, and, depending on the weather, the ground is likely to be too dry, with the potential for more heat and dryness to come. But it is a great time to start the preparation, ready for laying turf or sowing grass seed in the autumn. This may sound mad, when there is already plenty to do and the weather is also perfect for relaxing, not just working in your garden... but, by preparing the soil now, you'll encourage weed seeds to germinate and you can then remove them before you start to make the lawn!

● Check for signs of the dreaded vine weevil – classic symptoms are notching around leaf edges and plants whose roots have literally been eaten out of existence. Plants in containers are especially prone to attack by these horrible pests and they are often killed. If the creamy-coloured C-shaped grubs are in the compost, that confirms the problem and means that you can also use the nematode control – great as it not only works effectively but is also safe for pets, wildlife and humans.

● Pond and marginal plants are starting to get a bit scruffy now. The problem with this is that their foliage then starts to flop into the water and rots. This then causes gasses to be released, which may prove toxic to wildlife in the pond or fish, especially if the pond then freezes over in the winter. Just cut off grotty leaves and pop them in the compost heap.



Japanese Anemones

With a perfect combination of elegance and informality, what's not to like about the Japanese anemones?



There were some in my childhood garden, there are some in my garden now.

My Top Ten

- Anemone 'Frisly Knickers'
- 'Honourine Jobert'
- 'Dreaming Swan'
- 'Konigin Charlotte'

- 'Prinz Heinrich'
- 'Elegans'
- 'Wild Swan'
- 'Pretty Lady Susan'
- 'Hadspen Abundance'
- 'September Charm'

Give your piglets the best start

Emma Slater, technical adviser for Farmgate Feeds, explores the importance of sow nutrition for producing healthy and robust piglets

WE KNOW that nutrition plays a vital role in a sow's reproductive performance, and, to reach her full potential, all essential nutrients and vitamins should be in good supply.

This is not just about supporting healthy and productive sows for longer, but also giving their pre-natal and newborn piglets the best start in life. A piglet's nutrition starts long before they are born, and our focus should also be on their growth prior to birth, making sure that the sow is provided with the right balance of nutrients.

Over recent years, research has highlighted the importance of omega-3 fatty acids in health nutrition. Omega-3 is the name given to the family of essential, unsaturated fatty acids. It's familiar to us all and we know the importance of it in our own diets, but this nutrient also brings benefits to a sow and her piglets.

Pigs can't produce omega-3 themselves, so it needs to be supplied as part of a well-balanced diet, which can bring wide-ranging benefits for pig keepers, too. Omega-3 fatty acids are involved in the structure and growth of all cells in the animal and, as result, there's

good evidence to support the important role it has in contributing to healthy litter sizes and weaning weights.

The fertility cycle in pigs starts with the production of a wave of follicles, about 25 per wave for sows; and a healthy piglet comes from a strong, viable follicle. The hormone responsible for ensuring a food source is available to the follicles relies on omega-3 to do its job properly.

If omega-3 fatty acids are in short supply, then, potentially, food to the follicles will be too, not allowing them to grow and potentially impacting litter size. So it's vital to ensure that your sow's feed contains the right balance of vitamins, minerals and omega-3. This will have a positive impact on their reproductive performance, as well as improving litter size and weight.

This supply of essential nutrients must continue during the critical lactation period. Colostrum is the first milk produced by the sow and it's full of energy, antibodies and key nutrients. Sows only produce colostrum for 24-48 hours, so sufficient early intake and the quality of the colostrum is essential.

The first six hours of colostrum intake is one of the most important success

factors for pig performance. Optimising sow nutrition during late gestation and throughout the transition period can positively affect key proteins found in sow colostrum.

Good quality colostrum will kick-start the piglet's immune system and helps to prevent disease susceptibility. By giving your piglets a strong start alongside promoting good quality milk production, you can also expect to see heavier weights at weaning.

Farmgate Feeds Sow & Weaner range is balanced with essential nutrients whilst also containing a unique combination of omega-3, fat-soluble vitamins and fibre to keep your sows healthy and give your piglets the best start in life.

Farmgate Feeds has an unrivalled range of products suitable for all stages of a pig's life, and an expert team to support you on all aspects of pig nutrition and welfare. 🐷

For more information

Email: info.farmgate@forfarmers.eu

Website: farmgatefeeds.co.uk

Tel: 0330 678 1188



Best foot forward

Don't dismiss laminitis as something that fat ponies get – it can affect any horse.

Jane Carley discovers what to look out for and how to avoid this painful condition

LAMINITIS is an extremely painful condition affecting one in ten horses/ ponies every year and can cause permanent damage to the hooves. Sadly, it can affect any horse, pony or donkey at any time of the year and not just in spring – there is no 'safe season'.

It impacts structures called sensitive lamellae that are located inside the horse's hoof and act like Velcro to form a strong bond to hold the pedal bone in place within the hoof.

Laminitis causes the sensitive lamellae to stretch, weaken and become damaged, which can cause the pedal bone to move within the hoof (for example, think of a zip being undone). In extreme cases, the pedal bone can even penetrate through the sole of the hoof, which is excruciatingly painful. In such cases, euthanasia may be the only treatment option to end the horse's suffering.

Hormonal laminitis is the most common form, points out the British Horse Society (BHS). It's now recognised that up to 90% of laminitis cases are caused by an underlying hormonal disease such as Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS) and/or Cushing's Disease, both of which are associated with insulin dysregulation.

This can lead to insulin resistance, where too much of the hormone insulin is released, also

If your horse is prone to laminitis, you may need to reconsider grazing arrangements

known as hyperinsulinaemia.

Weight gain more than doubles the risk of laminitis because it may cause hyperinsulinaemia, so it's important to keep your horse at a healthy weight and monitor any fluctuations.

Veterinary surgeon Lindsay Harrison notes that there was an early surge in grass growth this year, but comments that modern management can also predispose horses to laminitis.

"Horses should naturally lose weight in winter, as this keeps their

metabolism working, but owners are reluctant to let them drop condition now, so, in spring, they are building on top of their base bodyweight. Another issue is that many horses and ponies are kept on former livestock farms where the grass is too good for an animal that evolved to live on rough grazing.

"Finally, many get far too little exercise, and increasingly common small paddock sizes mean that they are not moving around enough."

A diet high in sugar is likely to encourage weight gain and could trigger laminitis in those susceptible (such as native pony breeds), says the BHS. It may be safer to allow susceptible horses to graze from late evening to early morning when it has been sunny, because sugar builds up in the grass during the day to be used up during the night, meaning that levels will be lowest at the end of the night and early morning.

Similarly, in cool and overcast weather, it would be safer to allow horses to graze between mid-morning to early afternoon.

Lindsay points out that signs of mild laminitis may be confused with other foot conditions, and that owners should bear it in mind if their horse doesn't seem quite right. The first course of action must be to get them in, off the grass, preferably onto a supportive and hoof-conforming bedding such as shavings, and call the vet, she says.

"If it's mild, just losing some weight by restricting the horse to a small paddock can make an improvement. The vet may want to take radiographs to assess the level of damage, and suggest corrective trimming and supportive shoeing by your farrier."

Most laminitics will need a continued programme of hoof care from the farrier to remain comfortable and remain sound. Longer-term management and prevention of a reoccurrence may mean controlling the horse's access to grass, and a change of regime, advises Lindsay.

"Woodchip turnout areas or the creation of a track system around or across the field where the horse has to keep moving to access grazing and water can work well. And once the horse is fully sound, consider increasing its workload, so that it's doing more and eating less."

Landowners could consider re-seeding paddocks with a more suitable mix of grasses and herbs for horses, which many companies now supply, suggests the BHS.

● For more information, visit: bhs.org.uk/welfare



ACTION: Radiographs can help in diagnosis of laminitis

The subtle signs of laminitis



Reluctance to turn



Change in behaviour / temperament



A shortened stride / a stiffened gait



Reluctant to pick up their feet



Shifting weight from foot to foot



Abnormal heat at the hoof wall or coronet



Being careful on hard or stony ground / preferring to walk on soft ground



A strong pounding digital pulse

The British Horse Society is a Registered Charity Nos. 210504 and SC0.

Getting back to business

As the country starts to come out of lockdown, **Kate Chapman** chats to rural business owners to find out how they're changing and adapting to the new normal world unfolding around us...



The Chequers of Weston, near Spalding, in Lincolnshire

Diversification has been key at The Chequers of Weston, where landlady Katie Booth has come up with a variety of ways to keep trade going after lockdown.

The pub already had a butchery department and offered outside catering, but Katie and her team stepped up by launching a weekly delivery service offering customers barbecue and picnic packs, freezer food, roast dinners, desserts and other items. They also opened a pop-up shop in the pub.

"We've been delivering to around 30 homes weekly and a few more fortnightly," says Katie, who took over The Chequers in 2018. "It's brought us some new customers and hopefully they will remain with us."

As she starts to think about reopening – potentially in August with restricted hours – Katie shared an online survey via social media to gauge customer feedback as everyone, even those just wanting a drink, will now have to book.

"We want to know if people feel comfortable coming to eat out, what their expectations are and whether they feel safe," she says. "I've also got to think about the safety of my staff and, unfortunately, because of the reduction in trade we may be considering redundancies."

"But nothing is set in stone, we're still waiting for more updates to government guidance."

● okcatering.co.uk/the-chequers



Peddlers Den, Malton, North Yorkshire

Rachel and Michael Morley had high hopes 2020 would be a great year for Peddler's Den – a luxury bunkhouse, which they opened last year after transforming a derelict barn on their 150-acre farm.

Up until lockdown the group accommodation venue – which sleeps up to 14 – had been proving popular with hen parties and cyclists keen to take advantage of the nearby trails in Dalby Forest.

Rachel says there have been lots of cancellations since March, although she's been pleasantly surprised by the number of enquiries for dates later in the year and says they're now coming from a more diverse range of groups.

"A lot of weddings have been pushed back to winter, so we're getting enquiries for December, January and February, which are typically our quieter times. We're also getting a lot of interest from multi-generational families who've had overseas trips cancelled and are now looking for something closer to home."

With regards to re-opening, Rachel will welcome guests back this month (July) "I really want to get going," she says. "If people are going to come and stay with us, they're coming because they're feeling healthy and feeling good."

● peddlersden.co.uk



Ardross Farm Shop, Elie, Fife

The Pollock family implemented big changes to enable Ardross Farm Shop to continue trading during lockdown. Staff became personal shoppers, picking and processing orders for delivery to the most vulnerable and for others to click and collect.

Nikki Storrar – one of three sisters running the shop selling produce from her family's mixed tenanted farm including beef, mutton, lamb and vegetables – said the first weeks were scary.

"Prior to lockdown everything started going crazy, we were unbelievably busy. People were panic buying and things that weren't necessarily huge sellers for us – pasta and flour – were cleared from the shelves, it really took us by surprise," she recalls.

"We endured horrendous sleepless nights trying to figure out what to do. We had vulnerable customers ringing us in tears as they couldn't get groceries delivered, neither could a local care home, so we decided to remain open."

The family didn't have time to create an online shop and were worried about the volume of orders it would generate. Instead, they used an email and phone system, hiring new staff to cope with the constant demand and to replace those who were shielding.

Deliveries are declining, although Nikki says these will continue as long as vulnerable customers require them. "I think we will also look at an online shop, but there's a lot of research and work involved to get it right. We're lucky – we are safe and well and still have a business left when many do not."

● ardrossfarm.co.uk



Rookery Meadows Drive Thru' Farm Shop, near Attleborough, Norfolk

When the UK went into lockdown, the Norfolk Veg Box delivery scheme was overwhelmed by a month's worth of orders in just 36 hours. It was a scary time for Richard Ewin, who has been running the business for the past decade, providing boxes of seasonal produce from a variety of local growers to homes and businesses across three-quarters of Norfolk.

"We went from a team of two-and-half up to 12 to cope with the increased demand. Thankfully, we were able to bring in resources from other companies such as delivery drivers, and other staff who had been furloughed or were down to working part-time," explains Richard.

"There was a real demand for cauliflowers, broccoli and cabbages, which we found ourselves very short of, but our asparagus grower was just about to start his harvest, so we were able to bulk out orders with that and added milk, bread and other staples, too."

The pandemic meant Richard's family's plans for a new farm shop were put on hold, so, together with his brother, Peter, who runs Wayland Free Range Eggs, they came up with the idea for Rookery Meadows - a drive-through contactless farm shop open from 10am to 2pm - which has been hugely popular.

"We're going to keep this going in the short-to-medium term. Numbers are steady, but we're aware some may go back to supermarket shopping. We're hoping the quality, freshness and range of seasonal produce we showcase encourages people to stick with us."

"We've tried to make it simple. We just need people to continue supporting us, as we have supported them with our various initiatives and different shopping experiences these past few months."

● norfolkvegbox.com



James Kittow Butcher and Grazier, Kilhallon Farm, Par, Cornwall

"Our business has almost gone full circle during the pandemic - we're back to our roots delivering meat door to door, just how my grandfather used to," says fifth generation butcher and grazier James Kittow.

He prides himself on his bespoke butchery service and, when the pandemic broke, James, was forced to look at alternative ways to keep the business going.

"We work with a local chef and had been talking about putting together some meat boxes for the summer, so we decided that would be the way to go immediately and we also created a 'Stay at Home' box for people to order," explains James.

He boosted his workforce by calling on a couple of people in the trade who were due to retire. He offers free delivery within a 15-mile radius, while those further afield incur a charge.

"My family's been building a business here for 140 years - supplying and looking after local people, we've just gone back to our roots," he adds.

"It is a shame though, that it's taken an outbreak like this to make the public realise how important our food chain is and how vital local shops and suppliers and producers are."

● jameskittow.co.uk

Digital Boost

Small rural business owners are among those being urged to take advantage of a new, free digital platform which hopes to equip them with the skills to help them harness more online business.

The pandemic has highlighted the lack of digitalisation within numerous small businesses and charities - many have been forced to shut physical locations and have no online revenue streams to fall back on.

Digital Boost aims to support these UK organisations impacted by Covid-19 on

their digitalisation journey by providing a community of digital expert volunteers to offer help through a range of workshops and skills resources.

It is hoped these tools will equip people with the essential digital skills they need to bring in more customers and revenue streams through online channels.

Owned by Founders4Schools, Digital Boost has been built with the pro bono support of BCG Digital Ventures, a subsidiary of Boston Consulting Group,

and is supported by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

"The new Digital Boost platform will help these organisations develop the skills they need," said Caroline Dinéage, minister for Digital and Culture at DCMS.

"We look forward to helping build a community of digital experts, who are able to offer guidance and support to these organisations, free of charge, at this challenging time."

● Visit: digitalboost.org.uk

Business tips & tricks



Based in the county of Worcestershire, Rhea Freeman offers small business coaching with a specialism in PR and marketing for equestrian and rural businesses. She's also a big fan of video, particularly for social media promotion. For more information, simply visit rheafreemanpr.co.uk

Back to school?

These past few months have been more than a little bizarre for everyone. Whether you're a key worker who's been working harder than ever before (thank you, if that's you), someone whose business has had to change very quickly to meet demand, or whose business has had to temporarily close due to restrictions. Perhaps you have been furloughed at work, or maybe have carried on as normal; it's all still weird, right?

One thing I do know is that many business people have been using this time to up-skill. Especially those who have a little more 'free' time than expected. Using this time to grow your skills can help with your existing ventures, particularly if you run your own business, as it will help you to promote/run/manage it better when you're able to get back out there again.

And, for people who have been furloughed, learning might also help you when you get back to work, or even start what's commonly called a 'side hustle' with your newfound knowledge. And, for those who have never been busier, learning something completely unconnected to your job or business could even provide you with a kind of escape and way to relax at the end of a busy day.

Money is what comes to mind when we talk about up-skilling and there are lots of amazing courses and memberships where you can spend your money (I offer both, so I'm biased on this!), but there are also lots of places where you can learn for free. More than this, I would strongly

suggest that if you're thinking of investing in training with someone, pay attention to and take part in some of their free offerings first, to make sure you like them and their teaching style.

But now, let's explore a few free ways to improve your knowledge in whatever area you like...

YouTube

First up, we're heading to YouTube, the hub of the how-to! Being the second largest search engine in the world shows why YouTube is a great place for those who want to learn. Type in 'how to' and get absorbing. Whether you've always wanted to know how to dismantle your vacuum cleaner or how to design graphics online, through to yoga, crafting, cooking and basically anything else, YouTube provides a free and constantly updated place for you to learn.

TikTok

'But isn't TikTok just for people dancing around?' Well yes... there's a lot of that, but there's actually a specific hashtag (#learnontiktok) for tutorials on the platform. They're all short and sweet, but still educational.

Podcasts

I adore podcasts and listen to as many as I can when I'm walking the dog. I enjoy marketing, entrepreneurship and small business ones, so I'm a regular listener of Holly Tucker's Conversations of Inspiration, Jasmine Star's podcast, Jenna Kutcher's Goal Digger, and Amy Porterfield's Online Marketing Made

Easy podcast. And mine too (Small & Supercharged)! These are ones that I enjoy, but whoever you are, there will be something for you. And what's more, podcasts are free to tune into and available on so many platforms, too.

Blogs

More of a reader? Blogs might be made for you. If you're looking for new people to learn from in a specific area, head to Google, type in your search term, and start checking people out. The only 'issue' with this is that anyone with a blog may appear to be an expert, but you'll get to find out soon enough.

Online providers

I've seen lots of organisations provide really good online training for free, especially during the past few months. I'm an accredited #SheMeansBusiness trainer – which is a system run by Enterprise Nation and powered by Facebook – so I have taught a fair bit on their platforms over the past few weeks, and also watched a number of Enterprise Nation's other talks, webinars and zooms – all for free. I know that the Federation of Small Businesses has a range of online learning, too, including a Skills Hub with a variety of free content on there.

I would say, though, that it's easy to get overwhelmed by what's available. So I try and focus in on either a handful of providers or a medium that I really enjoy, rather than trying to do all the things. Otherwise it can get a bit too much and what should be helping you, can paralyse you. 🐼

How to... preserve flowers

The height of summer is when most gardens look their best; the borders are a riot of colour and there's still plenty of lush foliage to add interest and texture, *writes Lucy Oates*.

If you enjoy gardening, arranging flowers or crafting, it's well worth gathering some of your favourite blooms and foliage now to have a go at preserving them. Not only will dried flowers brighten your home, you can also use them for all kinds of fun crafting projects on those long winter evenings.

Some plants, such as lavender, roses and eucalyptus, retain their fragrance when dried, making them a welcome reminder of the heady days of summer. Scent is just one of the reasons why people have been drying flowers for centuries.

It was the Victorians who took the art of drying flowers to the next level by creating ornate botanical displays in bell jars, and their passion for pressing flowers and leaves. Although it may have fallen out of favour a little, as fashions have changed, the practice

of placing lavender bags in drawers of clothing and displaying jars or bowls of fragrant pot-pourri was popular throughout the 20th century.

You can create some really stylish, contemporary looks for your home using dried flowers, and arrangements certainly don't have to be fussy. A single dried rose in a little glass bottle has a romantic, vintage quality, and dried hydrangea heads look stunning displayed in a vase or turned into a simple wreath for your front door. If the simplicity of grasses and seed heads is more your style, you can dry those out too.

You could even experiment with the fantastic range of spray paints available to give them a vibrant pop of colour once they've dried, ensuring that they tie-in with the interior decor schemes within your home.



Here are my three simple methods of drying flowers and plants:

Air drying

This method of drying really couldn't be easier! Simply gather together bunches of your favourite flowers and foliage, tie them with rubber bands or string, and hang them up to dry, ideally somewhere away from bright sunlight to help preserve their colour. An airing cupboard is ideal, but I often hang bunches from the Victorian-style laundry drying rack in my utility room.

The main thing is not to leave them anywhere where they will get damp and go mouldy. Most types of flowers and foliage can be dried this way, and you'll see them gradually transform from fresh to dried material within the space of a few weeks.

Water drying

If, like me, you've ever left fresh flowers in a vase for too long, simply because you couldn't bear to part with them, you've probably almost achieved this method of drying anyway! It's particularly good for roses and hydrangea heads. The trick is to leave only a centimetre of water in the bottom of the vase, rather than allowing the stems to become submerged and soggy, which will cause them to rot.



Pressing flowers

I remember pressing flowers with my mum, as a child, but hadn't tried this method for years until my daughter and I recently spent a happy morning gathering lots of pretty little flowerheads, leaves and grasses from the garden. We then set them all out on sheets of absorbent paper, leaving plenty of space between each item; popped another piece of paper over the top and then put the sheets between the pages of some heavy reference books, which we then piled on top of one another to add a bit more weight.

In just a few short weeks, they'll be completely flat and perfectly preserved, ready for us to use to decorate homemade greetings cards, create nature-inspired collages, and any other crafting projects that we can think of. This method of drying is best for small, delicate items, such as pansies, daisies, forget-me-nots and ferns.



What materials to dry and when to pick them

You can dry out pretty much any sort of plant material, from flowers to grasses, leaves and seedheads. Add herbs to your dried flower arrangements for fragrance, as well as colour and texture.

Roses, gypsophila, hydrangea, larkspur, delphiniums and lavender – all staples of the summer garden border – dry well and are ideal for displaying in arrangements.

It's best to pick them at the height of their beauty, before decay sets in and the colour begins to fade.

In the case of hydrangeas, it can be tempting to leave them on the shrub for longer as they look beautiful well into autumn, but be sure to pick them before the first frost, as some I was given last year turned brown because they'd been left outside a little too long.

Experiment with a variety of different materials to see what works best.



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* 134 of 166 respondents: Allergy UK Survey, 2015



New chicks on the block



**Words by:
Clare Hunt**

Clare is a writer and smallholder novice enjoying the good(ish) life in Cornwall

What's good for the goose, isn't necessarily good for the smallholder, as **Clare Hunt** has discovered...

ONCE – what seems like many lifetimes ago – I bought a cockerel on the spur of the moment. It didn't end well. Not only was Colin breathtakingly savage, he also strongly disapproved of sleep (even at night), which made him hard to like. Did this experience squash my tendency to spontaneously purchase poultry? It would seem not. How do I know? Well, hello goslings.

In my mind's eye, if I picture a smallholding from days gone by, there's always a goose somewhere in shot. Pottering peacefully, nibbling at the grass and only occasionally deviating from its grazing to intimidate the postie. This is why I purchased two goslings – I have tradition on my side.

Pretty much everyone to whom I mentioned my newly-acquired geese furrowed their brows, sucked their teeth and expressed the opinion that they'd turn out beastly. But, as tiny babies, this was impossible to believe. At a few days old, they were uncannily like Orville the duck. Fluffy plumage in not-very-pretty shades of olive green and swampy

yellow? Improbably tiny wings, wholly out of proportion with their bodies? Conversely massive trip-hazard feet? All present and correct.

As I was raising goslings alongside a clutch of hen chicks, it was interesting to compare the two species. Both peeped and chirruped contentedly. But it was there that the similarity ended. The chicks were relatively clean; the goslings certainly were not. They also seemed pre-programmed for destruction – trampling everything in their path like web-footed tanks, tipping food bowls in their wake, and attempting to bulldoze their way into the hen enclosure.

Of course (and I did have an inkling this would happen), it was the water that caused untold excitement. The goslings flung it about with their beaks, paddled in it with their flippers, and determinedly squeezed their fluffy bottoms into the dish. Top-ups were required on the hour, every hour, with an empty bowl being heralded by indignant whistles.

While I was at their beck and call (looking in on them, ooh, at least 50 times a day) it was impossible to overlook their growth rate. I collected them when they were two days old, already so well-developed it was beyond fathoming that they'd been inside an egg so recently. At that stage, I could hold them both in my hands at once. A week later, I could barely get my fingers around one. I'm certain that if I'd sat still and watched for an hour, their expansion would have been visible, like a gradually inflating hot-air balloon.

Initially, I'd made their goose nursery from a substantial cardboard box. But, having underestimated their size and potential for mayhem, on day one an extension was required. By day two, an entirely new goose-complex was under construction. Two weeks on and they'd made the move outdoors, where they thundered around their pen, heads down, endeavouring to coordinate their massive feet.

My one regret is not keeping a weight-gain chart – I bet it would have been astonishing. They outgrew the kitchen scales within days. Before long, I imagine I'll have to take them to a public weighbridge.

Research tells me that this incredible-hulk-style growth spurt lasts only for the initial four-to-five weeks, after which things will become more gradual. Which is something of a relief. They've already imprinted on my husband and I, rocketing along at our heels like we're Mother and Father Goose. When they see us coming, they barrel towards us, pipping with glee. If they don't stop growing soon, there's a real possibility of being trampled under flipper. 🦶

GROWING FAST:

Clare Hunt's goslings are rapidly approaching full goose



View from the farm: August

The past month has brought some welcome rain to **Joe Stanley's** farm and, in sunnier spells, a chance to make hay and silage



Words by:
Joe Stanley

Joe farms in partnership with his parents on a mixed beef and arable farm in Leicestershire

BEGIN THIS MONTH'S column in the now customary fashion with a weather update! I'm pleased to write that in June we finally received some welcome rain that was sorely needed for crops and grass across the country. Long-range forecasts were (happily) proven wrong and here at Springbarrow we received significant rainfall over a 10-day period; from still, drizzly days to sudden torrential cloudbursts accompanied by thunder, lightning and high winds. These storms can prove capricious, however, and many is the farmer on social media lamenting their neighbour receiving half an inch of life-sustaining rain – while they get only mist. A real postcode lottery.

A few weeks before the glorious weather of April and May finally broke, I was visited by BBC East Midlands Today, who filmed a follow-up piece to their series focusing on the effects of the extreme wet weather of winter. I was unfortunately able to show them my wheat crop, which was the first to feel the ill-effects of the now dry weather. I explained that it was remarkable (and incredibly challenging) that the wettest February on record was being followed by the driest May.

Some of that wheat crop, sadly, withered and died before the rain could reach it; the rest will undoubtedly be 'compromised' come harvest, which is a huge shame given the Herculean efforts to plant it over the winter, and the already low national wheat crop.

The spring barley planted during lockdown in recent months will, I hope, escape relatively unscathed, having received the rain just in time as it began to wilt. Fingers crossed, and look out for it in the form of Budweiser beer later this summer!

One of the benefits of the extended period of dry weather was that it allowed livestock farmers ample opportunity to gather in the first cut of silage unhindered by rain. At Springbarrow we even made our largest area of hay in my memory, during May, which is really unusual. On our farm we generally only harvest one crop of grass per year, which is enough to see us through the winter with our 150 or so cattle. When we had a dairy herd of similar numbers (with their greater nutritional requirements) we would harvest two or three cuts of grass for silage.

Silaging has always been one of my favourite jobs of the year; the smell of dozens of acres of tall, cut grass can be intoxicating. The basic principles of silaging are that you cut the grass 24-48 hours before you intend to pick it up to allow a little time for it to wilt. Then a rake will row the grass together to allow a forager to more rapidly and easily blow the grass into a trailer, which is then taken

to the silage clamp in the farmyard to be tipped and added to the pile by the 'buck rake' operator (pictured, below right). The grass in the clamp is then repeatedly compressed by driving the buck rake around to force out as much air as possible, before being covered in plastic, which is weighted down (usually with the ubiquitous farmyard tyres!). This then creates anaerobic conditions in which the grass ferments and turns to silage, which will keep in this state for a number of years.

We've always cut our grass with our own mower, but, to my memory, we've always used contractors to row and pick-up. I remember when I was young, our neighbour used to come with his small forager pulled behind a tractor, blowing the grass into our 10-tonne trailers with removable silage sides. The whole operation could take a week. These days, large-scale contractors roam the countryside in convoys, with 1000hp self-propelled foragers (costing the same as a combine harvester) blowing

THE MANAGEMENT:
Once the engine is off, Toby and Ted, as ever, are keen to cast an eye over proceedings on the farm



CONTRACTOR FACTOR: The tractor with rake pulls the mown grass into rows



GREEN HARVEST: The grass is then dispensed into a tractor and trailer to be taken back to the farm



STORAGE: The grass is pushed into the silage clamp, where it can be used as animal feed over a lengthy period of time



the grass into huge 20-tonne trailers at frightening speed. Grass which took me 12 solid hours to cut was picked up and clamped in two! Sometimes I miss the old days; silaging used to be much more of an ‘event’ in the calendar.

We’ve never had a huge amount of success in making hay; it takes a lot of patience and a long spell of uninterrupted good weather. Before the advent of silage, of course, hay was the staple winter food, but, with our longer, hotter springs and summers of recent years, it’s been making a comeback at Springbarrow. The grass needs cutting when it’s become quite tall and stemmy; ideally at mid-afternoon when the sun has formed the maximum amount of sugar in the plant.

Then, it will need ‘shaking out’ with a haybob, perhaps every day, until the sun has dried the entire crop through and there’s no more moisture in the grass. This will usually take 5-6 days; as a rule of thumb, wait until you think it’s ready to bale, then leave it another 24 hours! We always used to make small hay bales – ‘idiot bricks’ that are moved by hand – but, these days, they’re 500kg monsters which need moving with a telehandler. It’s important to make sure the hay is truly dry before baling, or as with the straw you may recall my telling you about at harvest, damp spots can become fire hazards at worst, or go mouldy, at best.

Grass to meat

After the grass has been cut and removed from the fields, the cattle can be released to clear up ‘the aftermath’. Any grass or hay which has been missed or spilt by the machines, or that’s still growing around the perimeter of the field, can be eaten so nothing is wasted. After this, it’s a waiting game depending on the weather as to how long it takes before there’s a useful amount of regrowth for stock to once again graze the fields, turning otherwise inedible grass into high quality, nutrient-dense protein – and returning valuable manure to the soil in the process. Such is the basis of our sustainable British livestock industry.

In the past few weeks you may have seen the NFU’s food standards petition go from strength to strength with the support of celebrities such as Jamie Oliver and newspapers such as the *Mail on Sunday*. At the time of writing, it had reached more than one million signatures; people urging government to protect our world-leading standards of farming in future trade deals, and block the import of food that would be illegal to produce here from countries such as the USA.

Some 80,000 have also used the NFU’s simple online template to contact their MP on this issue. If you feel able to lend your support with either of these options, please do. The survival of our family farms and the next generation of young farmers literally depend on it.

The next month will see preparations for harvest get under way. I hope you can join me then. In the meantime, stay safe, and remember to keep an eye out for the Red Tractor marque when you shop! 🇬🇧

**Energy prices are
continuing to rise
every year**

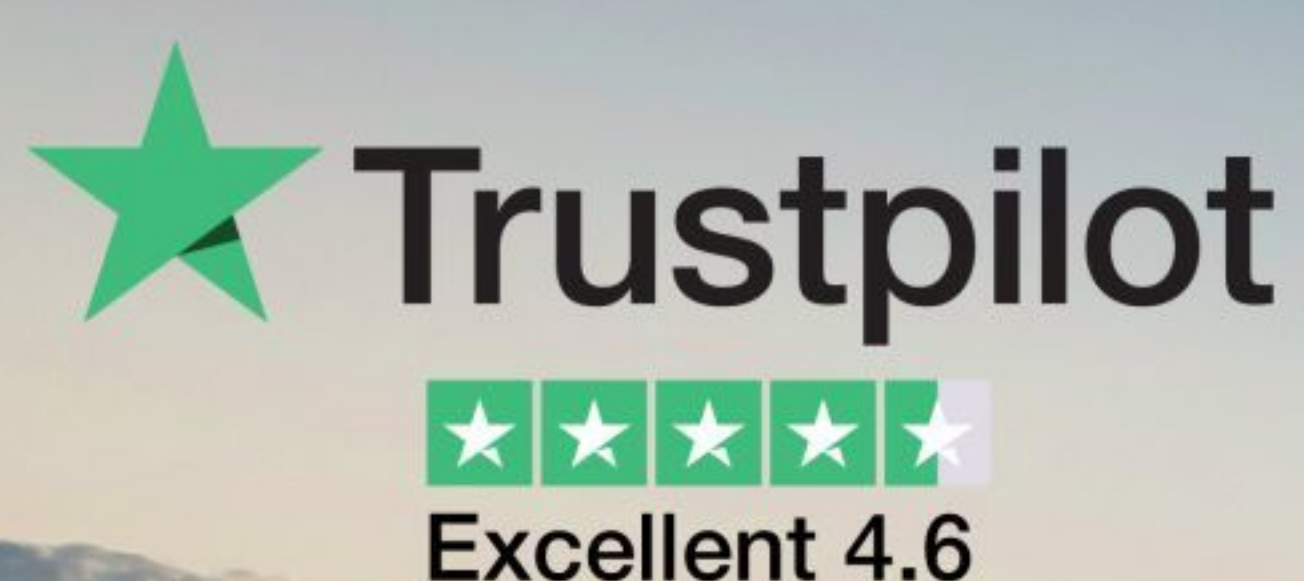


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Working 9-5(ish)

With **Vicki Stewart**, director of Brightwood Training Ltd, an organisation providing development training outdoors

5am: I'm woken up by the dawn chorus. I live on the boundary of four beautiful counties: Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Berkshire.

5.30am: My dog comes with me for an early morning run in the meadows before breakfast. I need to stay fit for my job, as it's very physical. It's also a good chance to check the weather for the day and notice wild food that I can forage. I like to keep my clients up to date on what to look out for either on social media or when I see them.

6am: Porridge made with Scottish oats, berries and honey sets me up for the day. I'm an instructor and consultant for Forest School and Team Development, so most of my training takes place on wild sites or forests.

7am: I drive to Ashdown House, the location for today's course. My job is varied: after leaving the RAF I started a community Forest School, then began offering outdoor programmes to schools and qualified as an instructor to train people who wanted to use outdoor learning with education.

I use team development psychological profiling to help corporate teams learn about how to function most effectively and then take them outdoors for bushcraft or team challenges. I'm also a Therapeutic Forest Practitioner and run accredited training in 'Challenging Behaviour and Neurodiversity in the Outdoors' for people working with young people who have these needs, so that more children can access the outdoors.

Today, I'm working with teenagers who have been excluded from school and have psychological needs such as ADHD or autism. The outdoors is incredibly beneficial for them; we see less challenging behaviour and need for medication. It becomes a place where they can learn to live and eat healthily and, for some, it can be the start of a career in the outdoors.

8am: We set up our shelter under Yggrdrasil, an ancient ash tree in the woods.

9am: The group arrives and the day begins. Every programme we run is based on understanding the sustainability, ecology and the impact we have on the outdoors. We also try to involve the countryside workers we see and explain their roles in the environment, whether it's farmers bringing in the harvest or rangers looking after pheasants. A tiny activity, such as cooking bread over the campfire, includes topics such as looking for wheat fields, seeing a flour mill and preparing food outside. When the participants see the whole process, they understand why we need to care for the countryside and how every



OUTDOOR SKILLS:
Teacher Vicki Stewart

action we take has an impact on nature and the wider environment.

I've seen children have a complete 360 degree turn from hating the bugs, cold weather, and mud to being immersed and passionate students.

12pm: We light the campfire at lunchtime to demonstrate how to cook foraged food such as nettle crisps, nutcakes in hazel leaves, wild garlic on campfire bread or pizzas. By far the most popular is always campfire doughnuts! It's a good opportunity to teach safe campfire management and leaving no trace of our presence.

1pm: The session is over and I manage to fit in an outdoor swim in the lake before returning home.

2pm: In the afternoon, I'm often working on writing new or bespoke training or courses. It might be how to work outdoors with clients who have mental health issues, or storytelling for an educational curriculum, or how to use outdoor learning in schools. I have corporate clients who need to talk through what their aims are for their staff who will come on a team development day, and we'll discuss ideas. I work on writing funding applications with charities for programmes so that we can run outdoor learning for groups who might not usually get to experience the outdoors.

6pm: It's a beautiful summer evening so I enjoy a BBQ in the garden with my family using vegetables from the lovely outdoor market in my town.

8pm: I sometimes lecture online, usually for Bath Spa University, but tonight's is for a charity on ways of working in the woods with people who have PTSD.

9.30pm: I quickly check social media and answer a couple of queries via email from students who are on my courses.

10pm: I unwind with a couple of chapters of Isabella Tree's 'Wilding' before bed.



Helping you to get back on the road

NFU Mutual's special offer gives rural drivers that extra peace of mind, should they experience a breakdown

YOU GO TO START your car after weeks or months of little or no use. But just when you need it most, it won't start. Country dwellers know all too well how disruptive this can be, particularly if you live in an isolated, remote area far from the help of a garage.

And your car can be a real lifeline, especially in these exceptional circumstances when you and your family might have been relying on it for essential trips.

If your car won't start you wouldn't be alone: at-home call-outs for NFU Mutual customers have surged by 111% during lockdown and the problem is expected to continue.

Help for rural drivers

As a mutual, we are trying to assist our customers in these exceptional times, in ways that really matter. So, to help our rural customers who have private car insurance or light goods vehicle insurance, we're providing complimentary or upgraded RAC At Home and national UK Recovery breakdown cover until the 31 August 2020.

The offer, which comes at no extra charge, also applies to new customers who take out NFU Mutual's private car insurance or light goods vehicle insurance before the offer ends. It's just one of the many ways we at NFU Mutual are supporting our rural customers and key workers during lockdown.

The extended cover will provide a lifeline for customers and includes national UK Recovery and At Home. The cover will include:

- Emergency roadside assistance
- Recovery of the vehicle, driver and passengers to any UK destination if the vehicle can't be repaired at the roadside
- Accidental misfuelling cover
- Unlimited call-outs and no call-out charges
- Assistance at home or within 1/4 of a mile from home
- Small hire car for 48 hours if the vehicle needs a longer repair and the repair can't be done on the same day.

What to do if your battery is flat and your vehicle won't start

Without vehicles being driven regularly for periods of more than 15 minutes, their batteries can lose charge and won't have enough power to start the engine. This could happen if your



essential journeys have been especially short, or you simply haven't been using your vehicle at all.

If this happens to you, and your car won't start, then consider if you could jump-start it. You'll need another vehicle with a charged battery parked close by. Be sure to take the vehicle that you've jump-started immediately out for a decent run of at least 20-30 minutes to charge its battery back up again.

If jump-starting isn't an option for you, or you're still having trouble, then call for assistance. 📞

● **Your local agency can explain full details of the cover and what's included. Full details can also be found by visiting: nfumutual.co.uk/rac-breakdown**

HELP IS AT HAND:
NFU Mutual offers extra support to their rural customers



NFU Mutual

Breakdown cover valid from 22.05.20 until 31.08.20 inclusive. Following this, if you have a Car insurance policy with us your cover will revert to 'Mutual Assist' breakdown cover which is included as standard as part of your insurance policy (excluding motor homes), unless you have upgraded. If you have a Light Goods Vehicle insurance policy with us you will no longer have breakdown services unless you have upgraded. The offer is available to existing and new NFU Mutual customers residing in the UK, or the Isle of Man.

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The Countryside guide to... soil

As a fundamental building block for life, soil is one of our planet's most critical assets. Much more than just dirt, the earth beneath our feet is complex stuff, teeming with goodness, and is the medium that grows our food, beautifies our landscapes and provides rich habitat for wildlife. **Clare Hunt** looks a little closer



Words by: Clare Hunt

Clare is a writer and smallholder novice enjoying the good(ish) life in Devon

AS ANY GARDENER or farmer will tell you, everything starts with the soil. When it's airy, healthy and full of nutrients, it can grow anything. But it's another story if it becomes exhausted, compacted and waterlogged.

While we know that good soil is key to the productive growth of everything from pasture to forests, how much do we know about what it's made of and where it comes from in the first place? Unsurprisingly, there's more to it than immediately meets the eye.

What is soil?

In general terms, the material we call soil is a loose collection of materials, mixed but not bonded together, that sits on top of the Earth's rocky crust. It forms in complex layers (known as 'horizons') and comprises the subsoil, which can reach a depth of two to three metres, and topsoil, which accounts for the top 15 to 30cm.

Soil is created by the actions of processes including weathering. Like fossil fuels such as coal, it's theoretically a renewable resource, but it takes a very long time to form.

Rocks are the 'parent materials' of soil and, over thousands of years, they're eroded, fragmented and pulverised by persistent assault from wind, ice and water, extremes of heat or cold,

grinding pressure and chemical reactions.

Because rocks themselves come in many distinctive varieties – from soft sandstone to flaky flint – the soils to which they contribute have very different profiles.

At first glance, the recipe for soil is a simple one: take some ground-up rock minerals, add a few dashes of organic matter (both living and dead) and throw in some air and water. Then mix, layer and compress to your chosen consistency.

While these may be the basic requirements for every type of soil, they can be combined in infinitely different proportions and the character of the ingredients can vary subtly or vastly, which is why we have such a diversity of soil types.

It might not immediately seem so, but soil is dynamic – it's always changing. As time passes, it becomes less and less like its parent materials. Phenomena such as drought or flooding can add new elements to the mix, or draw existing ingredients out.

Minerals break down or transform and organisms such as bacteria move in and change the balance. American soil scientist Hans Jenny coined the mnemonic 'CLORPT' to define the factors that influence soil formation. These are climate, organisms, relief, parent material and time. Lots and lots of time.

Identifying soil types

As well as the basic ingredients, a major factor in the way soil feels and behaves is the size of the mineral particles it contains. The very finest particles may measure one or two thousands of a millimetre in diameter, while the largest might be a chunky 2mm. The mineral components of soil are clay, silt and sand, with clay having the smallest particles and sand the biggest. Anything bigger than coarse sand is categorised as stone, which, in itself, can range from powdery grit to substantial boulders.

When classifying soil types, scientists take into account the proportions of clay, silt and sand present, along with the range of particle sizes present. The various classifications of soil have different defining characteristics and uses, as follows:

Clay: dense and sticky soils containing more than 30% clay particles are considered 'heavy' and can be hard work to cultivate. They shrink and expand according to the weather, are slow to drain, and equally slow to warm up in spring. The pay-off is they can be more fertile than other soils and water retention is a bonus in dry years.



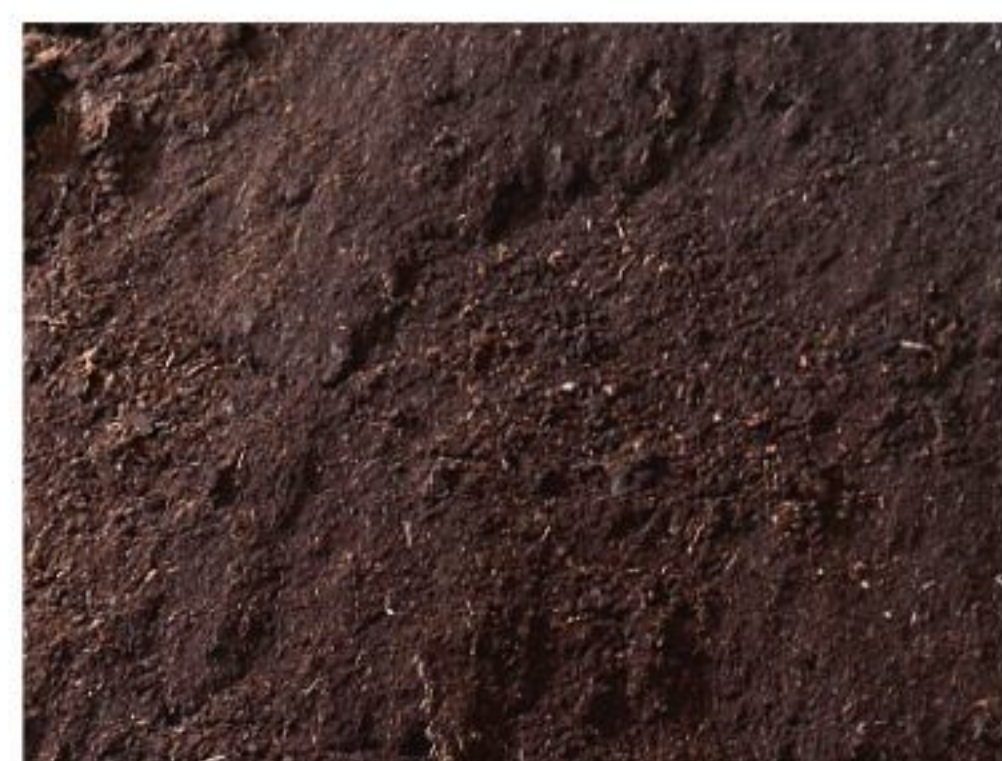
Sandy: easy to work thanks to their free-flowing nature, sandy soils warm early in the spring and drain freely. They're often low in nutrients, which wash away readily through the large sand particles, so they require the addition of plenty of organic matter to make them fertile and keep them moist.



Silty: made up of medium-sized particles, silt soils straddle the extremes of their sandy and clay counterparts. They're generally fertile, draining well but retaining necessary moisture. Easy compaction means they need to be managed carefully though, or air can't circulate and they become waterlogged.



Peaty: dominated by organic matter such as partially decomposed sphagnum moss, these are soils that appear more frequently in wetlands than in gardens. They're very fertile and boggy, and, though tricky to cultivate, they're vital assets that draw carbon from the atmosphere and store it away.



Chalky: light or heavy, gravelly or stodgy, these soils are always high in calcium carbonate. Chunks of chalky stone and flint are often visible and the topsoil may be shallow. Although they're fertile, chalk soils are hard to manage as they drain quickly and their alkaline nature (with a pH above 7.1) makes it hard for plants to absorb nutrients.



Loamy: the gold-medal winner of soils, 'loam' is a byword for good earth. It's free draining but moisture-retentive and contains a balanced mix of clay, silt and sand, so is airy and fertile. If you're not naturally blessed with loamy soil, it's possible to create an approximation of it by adding plenty of organic matter and possibly sand to the soil you do have. Be prepared for hard work, though, as the process must be repeated every year.



Food for the soil

Give your garden or smallholding just a little TLC and it'll pay you back in spades...

Be generous with the organic matter:

compost not only adds vital nutrients and promotes moisture retention, it also improves structure and helps air get in so the soil can breathe.

Mulch matters: a quick-win for soil improvement, mulch locks in moisture, suppresses weeds and stops the surface baking or frosting.

Dinner time: organic applications like poultry poo pellets or fishmeal are nitrogen-rich - just what's needed for healthy green shoots. To get scientific, use a DIY soil testing kit to discover which minerals need replenishment and apply accordingly.

Cover it up: bare soil is vulnerable to erosion and nutrient run-off, so aim to keep it planted at all times. For seasonal veg plots, sow a green manure in the autumn to protect and replenish.

Let it breathe: getting air into your soil is crucial and can be fun, too, if you do it with nifty aeration shoes. Otherwise, delegate the job to your earthworms. In return for some tasty organic matter they'll 'plough' under the ground and throw in their nutritious manure for free.

Pick your plants: for an infusion of goodness, plant the kings and queens of nitrogen-fixing plants - the legumes. These include clovers to cultivate on lawns, lupins for the borders and beans and peas for the veg patch.

Turn things around: since farming began, the importance of crop rotation has been recognized. To avoid soil depletion and a build up of crop-specific diseases, it's worth following suit and planning a four-year system for your plot.



Britain’s farmers – champions of soil health

While improving soil health is clearly important for us all, for Britain’s farmers it’s a top priority, with many working hard to improve soil conditions and biodiversity on their own farms. Seemingly simple activities – such as reducing tyre pressures, installing cow tracks or over-wintering livestock indoors – prevent soil being compacted or churned up and left vulnerable.

To tackle erosion of exposed soil by the rain and wind, ‘buffer’ strips are planted around fields and ‘cover’ or ‘catch’ crops are sown to ensure topsoil is protected during periods where it would otherwise be left bare. Our farmers also look after an impressive 450,000km of hedges, acting as a natural barrier against wind erosion. Annual crop rotations, meanwhile, help nutrients to remain balanced and avoid the introduction of crop-specific diseases. Plus, using old-fashioned muck and slurry reinvests the soil with organic matter; as a happy side effect, it also encourages earthworms, which naturally aerate the tilth.

Of vital importance, not just to soil health but also to the environment as a whole, is the management of permanent grazing pasture. This acts as a ‘carbon sink’, with grass and plants drawing carbon from the atmosphere during photosynthesis and locking it away in their root systems or transferring it to the soil when they die back.

The vast acreages of grassland tended by farmers store many gigatons of carbon, which would otherwise be released into the air. In arable systems, although it may seem anti-intuitive, Britain’s farmers are employing minimum-till or no-till systems. These methods of cultivation are less invasive than ploughing and reduce soil disturbance. Planting seed without overworking the ground preserves a healthy soil structure, leaves earthworms and colonies of beneficial microbes undisturbed, and lets the roots of previous crops to rot back down into the soil, returning nutrients and providing a feed source for soil biology.

Add a dash of delicious humus and a sprinkling of microbes...

No, not a tasty Middle Eastern treat made from chickpeas, humus is the rich dark layer often found on top of your soil. It’s made from thoroughly decomposed organic matter, such as leaves or the remains of insects and small animals, and is often churned and chopped by the action of surface-dwelling earthworms.

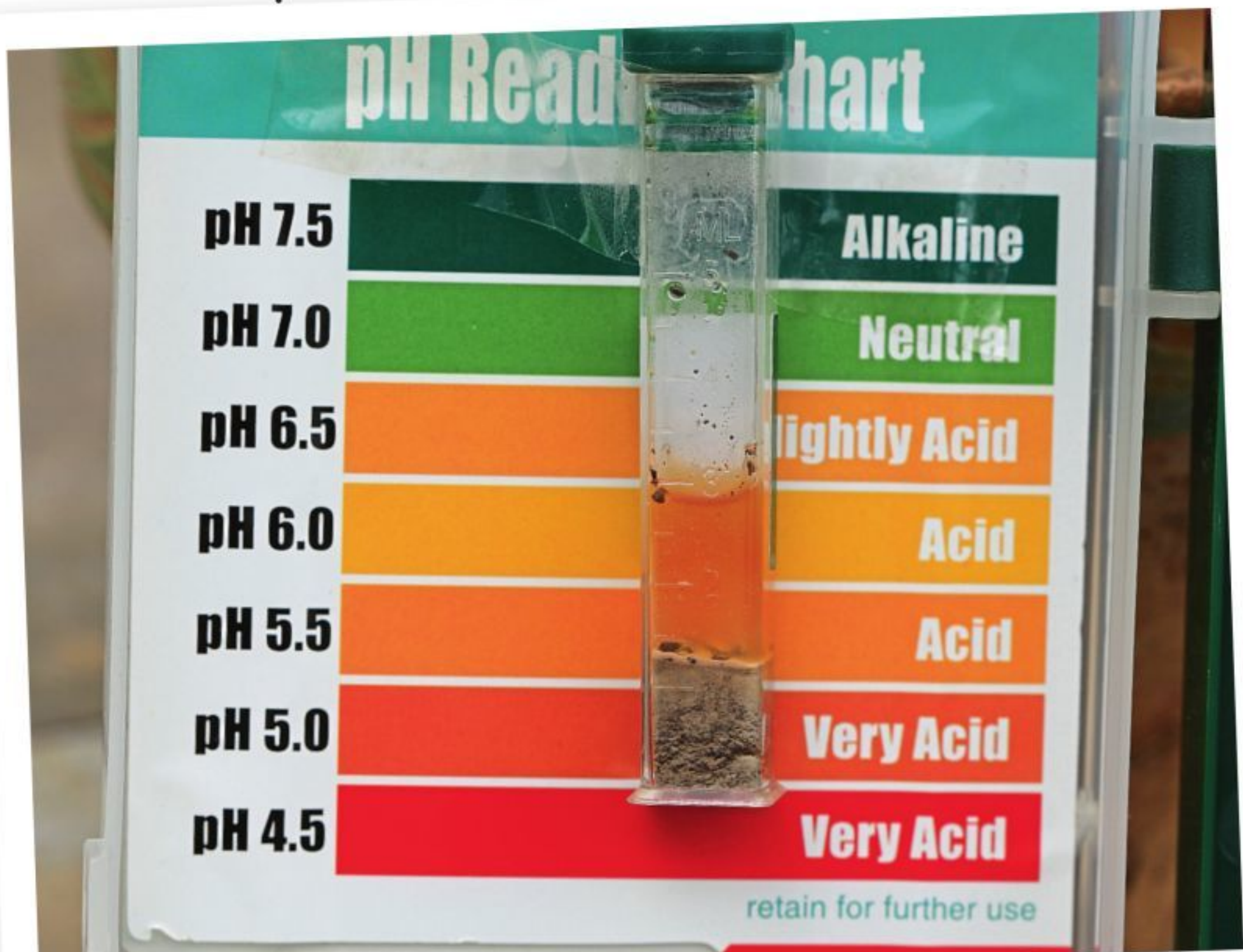
Humus is similar to compost, but is rotted to a more extreme degree and often forms under anaerobic conditions (without the presence of oxygen). It delivers nitrogen to the soil and also acts as a bulking agent, making for a more aerated structure and promoting moisture retention.



While humus is organic matter at its very dearest, the microbes found in soil are living organisms. Soil can contain an astonishing diversity and mind-boggling quantity of bacteria, protozoa and fungi.

In even a teaspoon of productive soil, these would be uncountable. They assist with the decomposition of organic matter, making soil more fertile and nutritious for plants, producing plant-growth hormones and fighting pests and diseases.

The dead organic matter and living organisms in soil have a symbiotic relationship. Along with air, water and minerals, they co-exist to create a balanced ecosystem that’s a super-recycler – taking dead stuff and turning it into an energy source for the living. Take one critical element out of the system and the whole cycle collapses.



Acid vs. Alkaline

If you’re serious about your soil, knowing its pH (or ‘potential for hydrogen’) and understanding how to manage it can be vital. A high pH above 7.1 signifies an alkaline, which (confusingly) has a low concentration of hydrogen ions. Pure water has a pH of 7, while acid (high in hydrogen ions) goes all the way to 0 in its most concentrated form.

Most plants thrive in slightly acidic or neutral conditions, so a soil pH of 6.0 to 7.0 is ideal. Exceptions include evergreen trees, blueberries and azaleas (all acid lovers) or lavender, lilac and honeysuckle (which thrive in more alkaline soils).

In very acidic soils, many vital nutrients become more soluble and are washed away. Phosphorus is less available in alkaline soils, making it hard for plants to use the sun’s energy. Lime can be added to increase the pH of acidic soil, while sulphur reduces it in alkaline soils.



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FARM BUILDINGS

Never more so than recently there remains a need for the nation's farmers to produce food. Buildings are key to this and need to be fit for purpose and fit for modern farming.

For new farm buildings, there are options available in terms of the route through the planning system.

Permitted Development

There is a whole range of development, which by its very nature is deemed to be minor and not require planning permission.

For holdings of 5 hectares (12 acres) or more, legislation allows for buildings covering up to 1,000m². There are a number of restrictions which need to be considered, and it must be demonstrated that the development is reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture. There are also different rules for holdings under 5 hectares (12 acres).

Prior approval of the Local Authority is required in terms of siting, design and external appearance and there is a procedure to follow.

Please note if you erect a building under permitted development rights from 20 March 2013, this nullifies your opportunity for a Class Q agricultural to residential dwelling change of use or vice versa for ten years on the holding.

Planning Applications

Planning applications for agricultural buildings should be treated positively by the Local Authority even in the Green Belt where agricultural buildings are not considered inappropriate. However, issues such as landscape impact, pollution, ecology, highways and access all need addressing, and in some cases an Environmental Statement will be required.

In some cases, pre-application consultation with the Local Authority is useful from the outset to understand the likelihood of success, key policies and the extent of information needed to validate an application.

As rural planning consultants and designers, Acorus has a wealth of experience in advising clients on meeting the building needs of their business. With the benefit of an experienced in-house design/drawing team, we work closely with each other to negotiate the complexities of rural planning. We understand the difference between different types of farming enterprises and have the technical experience to design farm buildings that work on their own or part of a group of buildings.

If you are considering a new farm building, new farmstead or relocation of an existing farm, including the potential for on-site accommodation, please contact us for advice and assistance on the planning process.

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Equestrian Review

For this month's Equestrian Review Panel, my team of testers put a variety of products through their paces, from boots to lip butters, and the perfect way to stay hydrated this summer, too

The testers are made up of equestrians who have taken part in my digital course called Social Supercharge: Riders, which aims to support equestrians in utilising and getting what they want out of social media. For more information about this course, see: rheafreemanpr.co.uk or follow me on Instagram @rheafreemanpr.



Words by:
Rhea Freeman

Rhea's company specialises in PR and marketing for equestrian and rural businesses

Amy Smyth @a_smyth is a showjumper from Ireland. In addition to producing horses for all disciplines, she also backs and schools a range of horses.



Topline Naturals - Soft Mouth

Created to help replenish lost moisture and encourage repair around the horse's mouth, Soft Mouth can be applied directly to the lips. The formulation is highly palatable (so your horse will love it too!) and can also be used to encourage young horses to mouth. Made from 99% organic ingredients.

What Amy says: "With the dry weather we've been lucky to have over the past few months, plenty of sun-cream has been applied to white noses. But, to have a product to apply to my horse's lips to help prevent them drying out is super. When you open the tub, the smell is exquisite - even the horses loved to inhale from it before the butter was applied."

"I also used it on my young horses when mouthing them during the backing process to encourage them to mouth. This helped to make the process more enjoyable for the young horses and, in turn, it was a positive experience."

£12.95

● toplinenaturals.com

Charlotte Ellis @thecountryequestrian is a Head Competition Groom for a showjumping yard and also owns a 17.2hh Irish Draught cross, called Rory.



Contigo Matterhorn White Marble

Created to keep drinks cold for up to 24 hours, and hot for up to 10 hours, the Contigo Couture Thermalock vacuum-insulated stainless steel water bottle is perfect for year round use. It's leak-proof when closed, is easy to clean, BPA-free, and fits in most car cup holders, too!

What Charlotte says: "As the bottle claimed to do so many amazing things, I really wanted to be able to test them out in real time. I started testing out the Contigo bottle when we had the beautiful weather in May. Firstly, it has a very handy loop that you can slip your finger through for easy transportation. I found that this was how I carried the bottle around with me a lot."

"The day that we had the cold spell and the very windy weather, I thought I would try the bottle out with a hot drink. The bottle kept my drink warm for the whole day, as I had forgotten about it until I came back into the house, so this is a very big winner for me."

£26.90

● maxicoffee.com

Rhea Freeman @rheafreemanpr runs the Small & Supercharged groups, memberships and podcast and also works with riders too. She also owns two horses of her own, Marilyn and Monty.



Ariat Belford GORE-TEX Boot

The Belford is a stylish country and equestrian boot which is designed to be waterproof, with the entire shaft being lined with GORE-TEX for deep water protection.

What Rhea says: "I'm a boot fan and have a few pairs from leading brands that I tend to wear in rotation, so these had a lot to live up to. They were comfortable straight out the box - and comfortable enough to take them on a dog walk straight away. I had the idea of wearing them in, thinking they might need it... but actually I didn't need to."

"What I really noticed was the way the soles feel when you walk - which sounds silly but I think anyone who tries these boots will instantly say 'yep - I get it!'. It's like you're walking on air and they are very comfy. Price-wise, £300 is clearly an investment, but I've been really impressed by them so far and I would pay this for them. If you're looking for some new waterproof, smart, country boots, I'd definitely add these to your shortlist."

£300

● ariat.com/gb/en

Tested



Words by:
Charlotte Reather
Charlotte is a leading country lifestyle journalist, comedy writer and mother of two



CHEESE, GLORIOUS CHEESE! It's a food of comfort and joy; one that requires the accompaniment of wine or a small tincture of port and, above all, it's sustenance to share. Because loading up a rich, runny, stinky delectation onto a piece of crusty bread or finely fashioned cracker with friends is one of life's greatest pleasures. So, it's only right and proper, during Covid-19, that my husband and I share our haul of Great British fromage at a socially-distanced tasting with our neighbours, retired teachers, John and Rosemary (J & R) in Slindon, West Sussex. We raised several glasses of red and many smiles as we sampled some British dairy delights during lockdown.

Great cheese-makers of Britain, we salute you!



Fen Farm Dairy Baron Bigod & Raw Bungay Butter

Hand-made in Suffolk by Jonny Crickmore from the milk of his herd of Montbeliarde cows, the Baron is a full-flavoured Brie-style cheese. Jonny has been working on the family farm nestled in the marshlands of the Waveney River Valley since the age of four, when he would sneak out of bed at 3am and follow his Dad to the cowshed to help with the morning jobs. Winner of Great Taste Award 2019, Baron Bigod is an essential addition to your summer cheese board. And I need a monthly subscription to the rich saffron-coloured Bungay Butter.

J & R's verdict: The Baron is soft, creamy and tasty and the butter is to die for.

250g Baby Baron £6

200g Raw Bungay Butter £4.50

● fenfarmdairy.co.uk



Errington Cheese Biggar Blue (goat's), Corra Linn (ewe's), Elrick Log (goat's), Isle of Mull (cow's), The Strathearn Whisky washed cheese (cow's)

Errington has put together a monthly selection to provide a full cheeseboard whilst supporting struggling Scottish cheesemakers. Included in the box is Errington's Corra Linn – a hard ewe's milk cheese, Biggar Blue, a raw goat's milk blue, the Elrick Log, an ashed raw goat's milk log made with traditional kid's rennet, an Isle of Mull raw cow's milk farmhouse cheese which is considered to be the king of Scottish cheddars. And, finally, the Strathearn, matured for four weeks and washed in a Glenturret single malt whisky.

Scottish Cheese Box selection with rhubarb chutney £35

● erringtoncheese.com



Lyburn Farmhouse Cheesemaker Stoney Cross, Old Winchester

Situated on the edge of the New Forest, Lyburn has been farmed by the Smales family for 50 years. They have made cheese for the past 20 years, with rising stars such as Old Winchester – a hard and crystalline cheese, reminiscent of vintage Gouda and Stoney Cross, a mould-ripened cheese similar to a Tomme De Savoie – it's 'creamy and buttery in texture and sweet with an earthy finish', which is probably why it's garnered a slew of awards.

J & R's verdict: Stoney Cross is gentle, creamy and undemanding; Old Winchester nutty and very good.

650g Stoney Cross + 500g Old Winchester £20

● lyburnfarm.co.uk



★★
CHARLIE'S CHOICE
Soft

Hampshire Cheeses Winslade, Tunworth

Founded by Charlotte Spruce and Stacey Hedges, making the first Tunworth prototype in her family kitchen, Hampshire Cheeses are made by a specialist team in a dairy nestled in the heart of Hampshire. Described by Raymond Blanc as "the best camembert in the world", Tunworth graces the tables of Michelin-starred restaurants and high-end shops across the UK. The Winslade is the newest Hampshire arrival and this Vacherin/ Camembert hybrid, encased in a spruce collar which gives it a distinctive pine note, is runny and soft and oh, so delicious.

J & R's verdict: Self-discipline required! Tunworth, £8 and Winslade, £7.50

● hampshirecheeses.co.uk



Lincolnshire Poacher Cheese

Original Lincolnshire Poacher, Vintage Poacher, Oak Smoked Poacher, Double Barrelled (two year) Poacher & Lincolnshire Red

The recipe for Lincolnshire Poacher cheese is a cross between a traditional West Country cheddar and a continental alpine cheese, such as Comte. There are, however, a number of trade secrets that give the supreme champion, gold medal-winning cheese its unique texture and flavour.

J & R's verdict: Firm, savoury and comfortably familiar. Good grub!

Lincolnshire Poacher 250g £6.80 (from nealsyarddairy.co.uk)

● lincolnshirepoachercheese.com



Trethowan Brothers Pitchfork Cheddar, Gorwydd Organic Caerphilly

Todd and Maugan Trethowan began their careers on the family farm in the Teifi Valley, Ceredigion. Using raw milk and the traditional method to create Caerphilly cheese, the brothers allowed it to mature longer than most. In 2014, they moved to a farm in Somerset and turned their attention to producing Pitchfork Cheddar. The cheese is cloth-bound, larded and matured for at least 11 months. Launched in 2018, Pitchfork Cheddar swept the board at the World Cheese Awards 2019/20.

J & R's verdict: An inviting looking cheese, great colour; the taste is sublime. Cut me a big chunk!

Pitchfork 250g £7.87

● trethowanbrothers.com



Ticklemore Cheese Beenleigh Blue (ewe's) Harbourne Blue (goat's) Devon Blue (cow's)

Robin Congdon was one of the first pioneers to revive the tradition of milking sheep in the UK, developing a range of distinctive cheeses. Present day Ticklemore cheesemaker Ben Harris says: "Serve Devon Blue with Peter's Yard Sourdough Crispbread (Pink And Black Peppercorn), Waterhouse Fayre Devon Apple Chutney and pair with good Perry."

J & R's verdict: The Beenleigh is creamy and strong, Devon Blue is strong but without the sharper notes of the ewe's cheese. Harbourne is tangy and very strong; suited to the macho aficionado!

Devon Blue 200g £4, Beenleigh Blue 200g £6.07, Harbourne Blue 250g £7.88

● thecheeseshed.com



Lynher Dairies Cheese Company Cornish Yarg, Cornish Kern

Lynher have been producing specialist cheese, such as Cornish Yarg, for more than 30 years, moving to a state-of-the-art dairy near Truro in 2006 using their own Ayrshire milk and milk from local farms. Bodmin Moor farmer Alan Gray produced the prototype in the 80s after finding a 17th century recipe for nettle-wrapped cheese in his attic (Yarg was named in his honour - it's Gray spelt backwards). Kern was created in 2010 - meaning 'round' in Cornish and is also the first four letters of Kernow, Cornish for Cornwall.

J & R's verdict: Kern is tangy, dense and inviting; Yarg is firm with a subtle flavour.

900g Yarg £16, 900g Kern £14

● lynherdairies.co.uk



Park Farm Bath soft cheese, Wyfe of Bath

Like a square brie, the mushroomy and creamy cheese (which comes wrapped in parchment paper with a red wax seal) dates back to the time of Admiral Lord Nelson who, in 1801, was sent some by his father as a gift. The Wyfe of Bath takes its name from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Succulent, nutty and creamy, it is made by placing the curd in cloth-lined baskets. Entirely organic, the Padfield Family have been milking cows for four generations.

J & R's verdict: Wyfe of Bath slightly crumbly, with nice edge. Bath Soft like a soft brie with good flavour.

Bath Soft 260g £7.50, Wyfe of Bath 250g £6

● parkfarm.co.uk



High Weald Dairy Brighton Blue (cow's) & Organic Seven Sisters (ewe's)

In the late 1980s, Mark Hardy and his parents established a flock of 150 British Friesland sheep at their family farm in Duddleswell. Soon they were bottling the surplus, making their own yoghurt and, finally, cheese. By 2003, the business moved to Horsted Keynes. High Weald Dairy now produces 15 different cheeses including, Brighton Blue, a mild, semi-soft cheese with blue green veins and a salty finish, and their most recent cheese, Seven Sisters, a matured organic sheep's cheese

J & R's verdict: Brighton Blue: good nose, delicious; Seven Sisters: not a fan of the texture but sweet and nutty.

Brighton Blue wedge 150g £3.71, Seven Sisters 125g £4.43

● highwealddairy.co.uk



Charles Martell and Son Stinking Bishop

The Stinking Bishop was launched in 1994 by artisan cheesemaker Charles Martell. A regular medal winner, including 'Britain's smelliest cheese', it has been given a Royal Warrant by Prince Charles. My postman thought something had 'gone off' in the parcel, but this full-fat wheel of gratifying stinkiness, with a natural rind washed in perry, is a personal dinner party favourite. Inside, the Bishop is creamy, full-flavoured and ... eaten, exceedingly quickly!

J & R's verdict: 'Very tasty and moorish' from Rosemary, but, for John, 'this creamy cleric was too High Church!'

Stinking Bishop 500g £30

● charlesmartell.com



Godminster Vintage Organic Cheddar, Oak-Smoked Vintage Organic Cheddar, Black Truffle Vintage Organic Cheddar

Made to a traditional 90-year-old recipe and matured for up to 12 months, Godminster cheddar is sold in 21 countries and was voted the Nation's Favourite Organic Product at the Soil Association's BOOM Awards 2019, taking Gold at the World Cheese Awards 2019.

J & R's verdict: Vintage: gritty and tasty, Black Truffle: strong truffle notes, and Oak-smoked: sweet and perfectly smoky.

Triple Cheddar Collection gift set with 3x 200g cheddars £26.50

● godminster.com



Alsop and Walker Lord London

Created in honour of the London 2012 Olympics, this dome-shaped semi-soft cow's cheese was served at the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's Royal Wedding Breakfast. Based in East Sussex, Arthur Alsop sources the milk used to make his cheeses from a local farmer. Alsop and Walker's Mayfield cheese is a cross between Emmental and Comte - smooth, sweet and nutty.

J & R's verdict: Smooth, creamy with a good nose it's delicious with the Alsop & Walker 'Apple Companion'.

£12 each (550g)

● alsopandwalker.co.uk



Simon Weaver Cotswold Blue, Truffle Gloucester, Cotswold Brie

The Weavers have been farming near Upper Slaughter in the Cotswolds for three generations. The Cotswold Brie is a soft moulded cheese with a creamy, clean taste; Cotswold Blue has a rich vein of Roquefort blue mould running through the centre that adds an aromatic piquancy. The Truffle Gloucester is a single Gloucester farmhouse cheese infused with minced black summer truffles.

R & J's verdict: Cotswold Blue: 'creamy with good nose, delicate flavour'. Not truffle fans, they like the 'modesty of the Cotswold Brie.'

Cotswold Brie 240g £4.20, Cotswold Blue 300g £4.80, Truffle Gloucester 220g wedge £9.99

● simonweaverorganic.co.uk



Colston Bassett Blue Stilton

Throughout its 107-year history, Colston Bassett Dairy has been making Stilton and Shropshire Blue. The cheeses are made using milk supplied by four farms, all within 1.5 miles of the dairy in the Vale of Belvoir. Stilton's PDO status (Protected Designation of Origin) means that the cheese must be produced in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire, using local milk and Colston Bassett is only one of six dairies licensed to make Stilton.

J & R's verdict: With a good creamy edge it hits the Stilton spot - bullseye! Definitely worth putting on weight for!

Colston Bassett Stilton 550g £12.50 (from finecheese.co.uk)



★★
**CHARLIE'S
CHOICE**
Blue

Cropwell Bishop Creamery Stilton & Beauvale

The Skailes family has been making and selling cheese for more than 160 years and has produced their award-winning Stilton in the Vale of Belvoir for three generations. With 13 Peak District farmers supplying the milk to the creamery, they are an important business in the area. The gooey Beauvale blue was created by Robin Skailes and Howard Lucas, and it melts in the mouth with a well-balanced flavour.

J & R's verdict: Stilton is salty and creamy; the Beauvale strong, full-flavoured and velvety.

Half Mini Blue Stilton 1kg £20, Beauvale 850g £18

● cropwellbishopstilton.com



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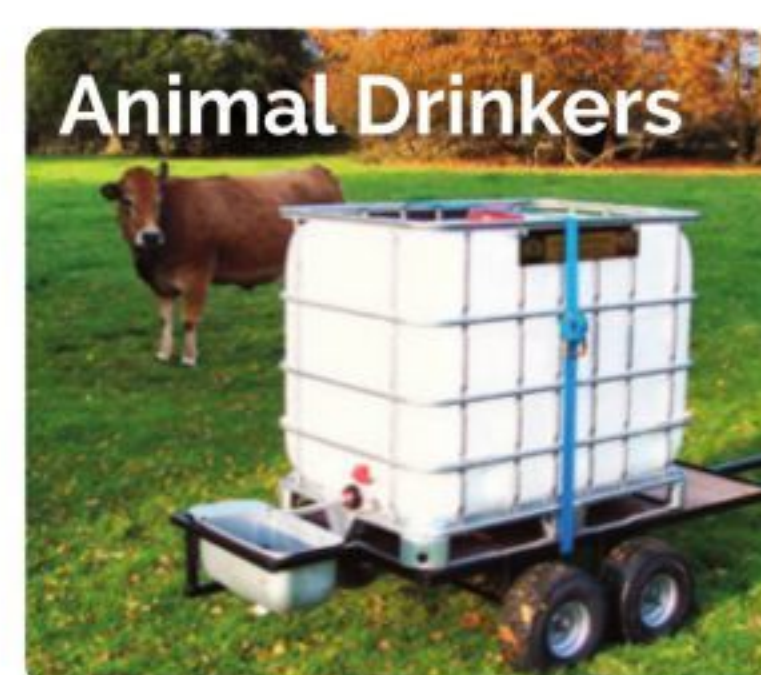
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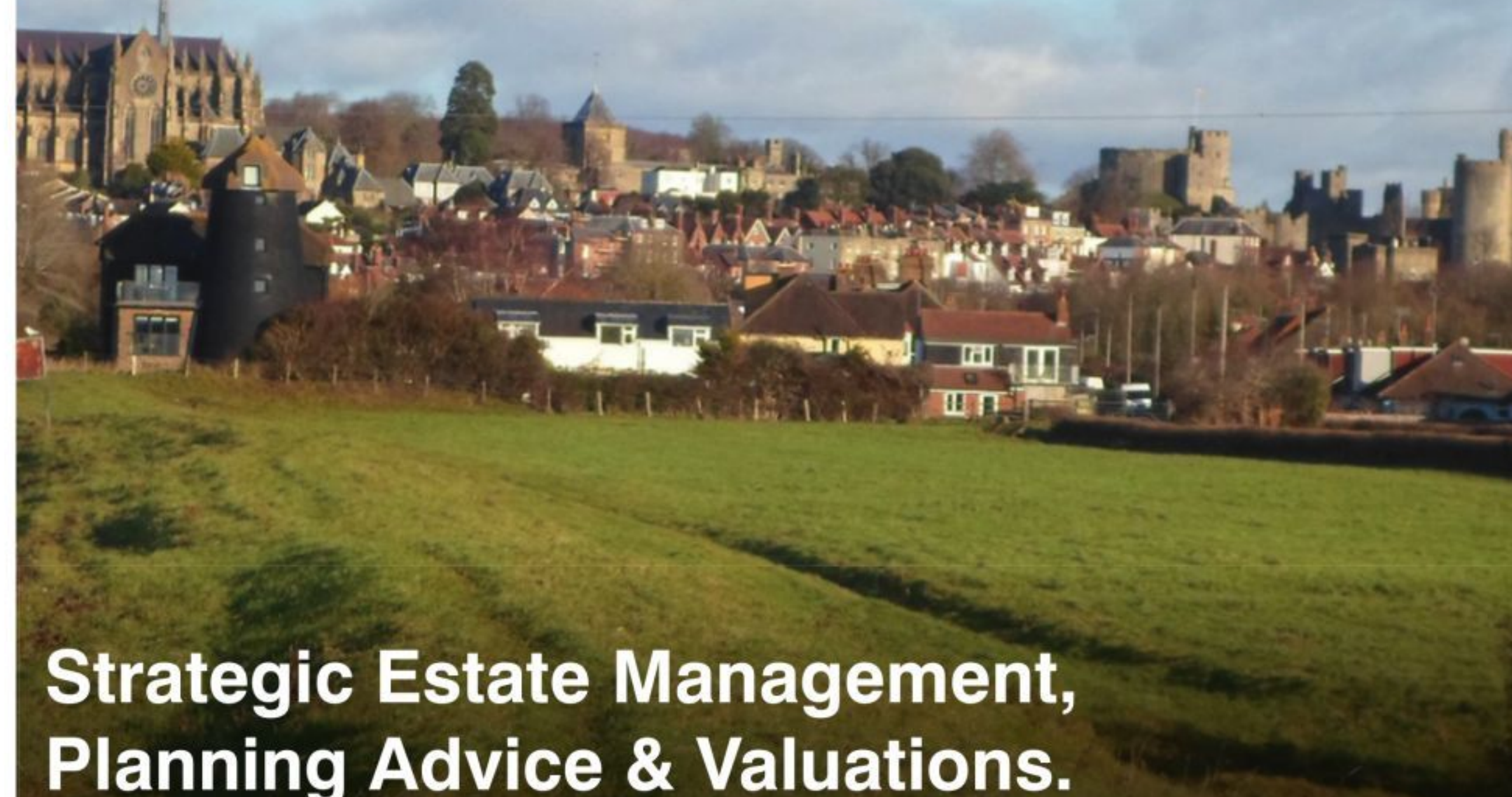
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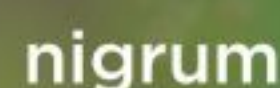
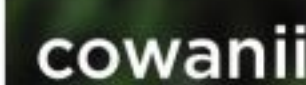
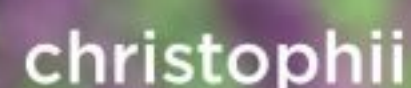


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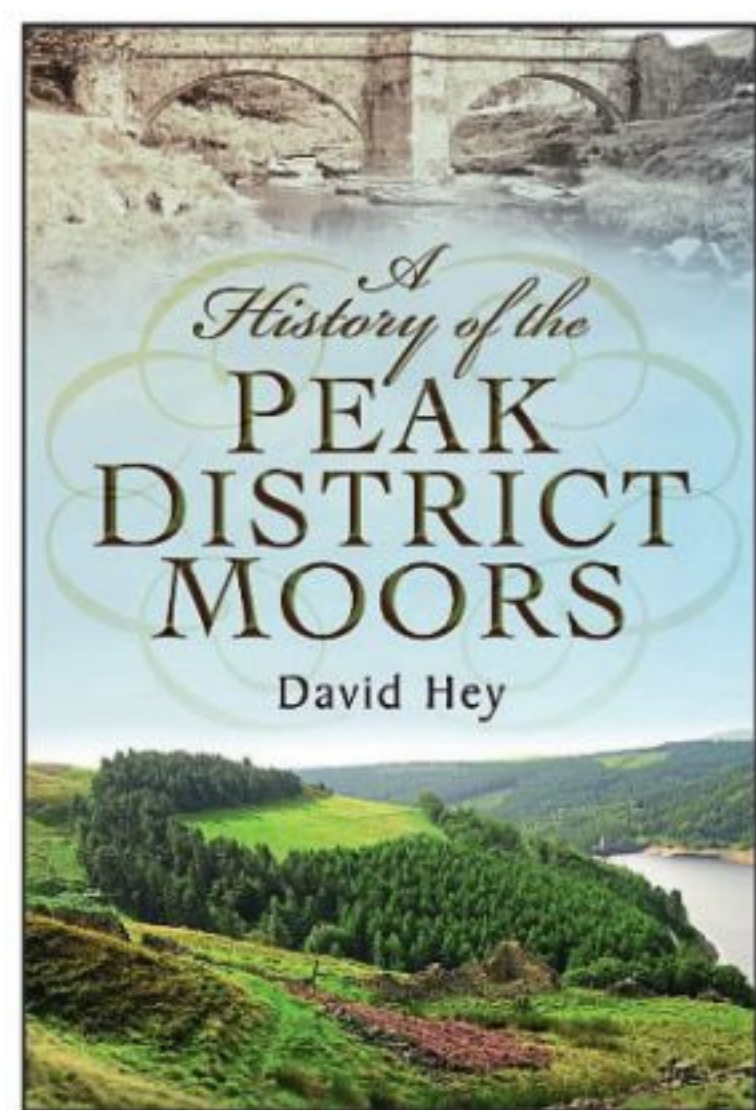
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A History of the Peak District Moors

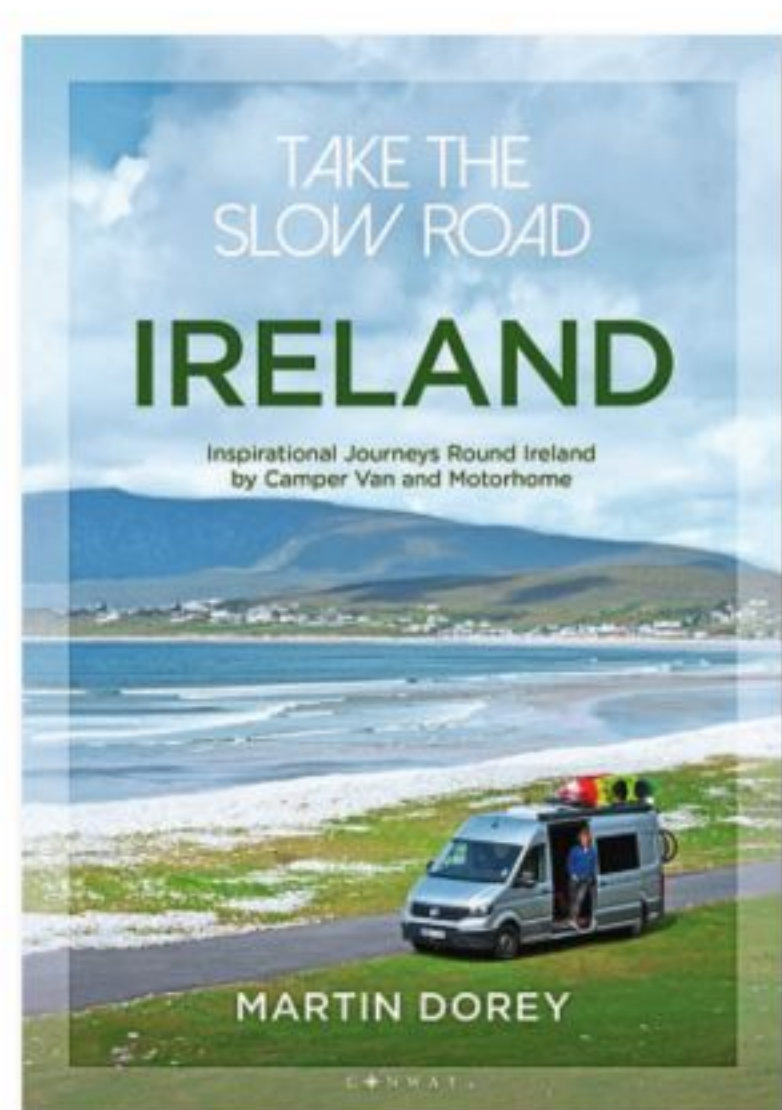
● By David Hey

Published by Pen and Sword Books, priced **£12.99 paperback**

The pleasure of rambling across the Peak District is enhanced by a deep knowledge of its history, ranging from prehistoric times through to the Middle Ages, and up to the modern day.

This book explores that history and also details improvements to the area, from canals and railways to turnpike roads and the history of grouse shooting.

The rugged beauty of the area is illustrated by more than 80 photos and illustrations. It's the perfect companion guide for all nature lovers or those wishing to learn more about this historic part of the UK..



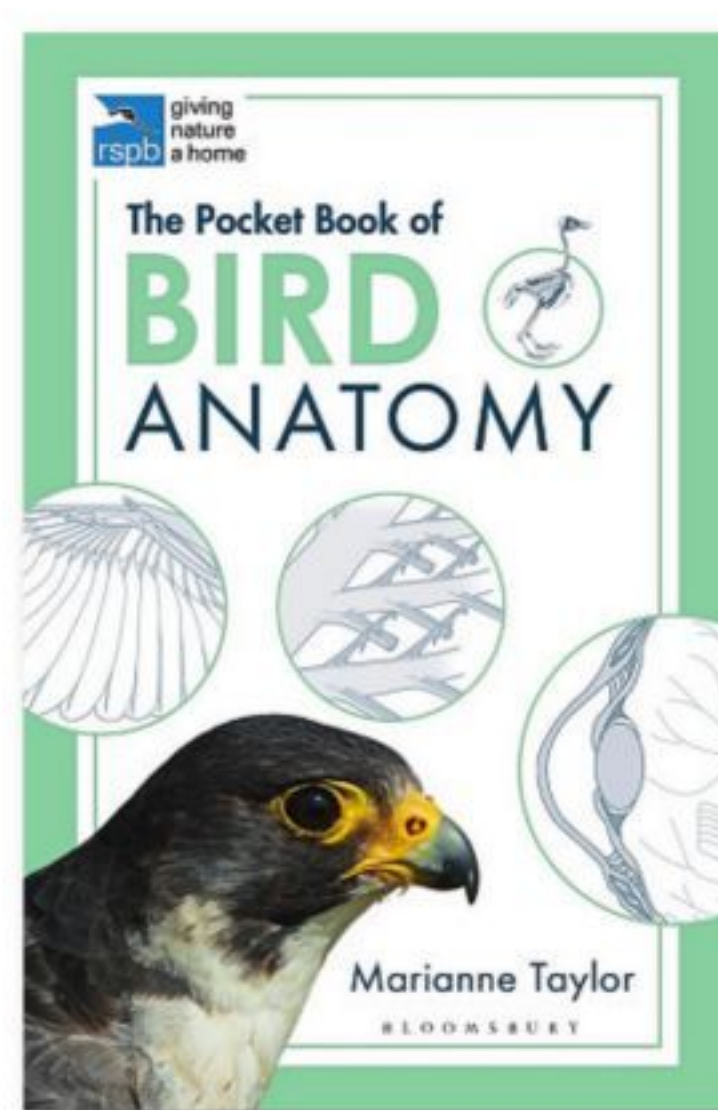
Take the Slow Road: Ireland

● By Martin Dorey

Published by Conway, priced **£20 paperback**

If you're looking for a little adventure once things get back to normal, but don't want to venture too far, then why not jump into your car or motorhome and head to Ireland?

In this, his third book in the bestselling campervan series, author Martin Dorey lets us into the best-kept secrets and driving routes around Ireland. From the coolest places to stay to the most spectacular sights, 'Campervan Guru' Martin reveals all. With hundreds of beautiful photos, handy maps and quirky travel writing, this book allows you to take the slow road and reveals a new way to enjoy the Emerald Isle.



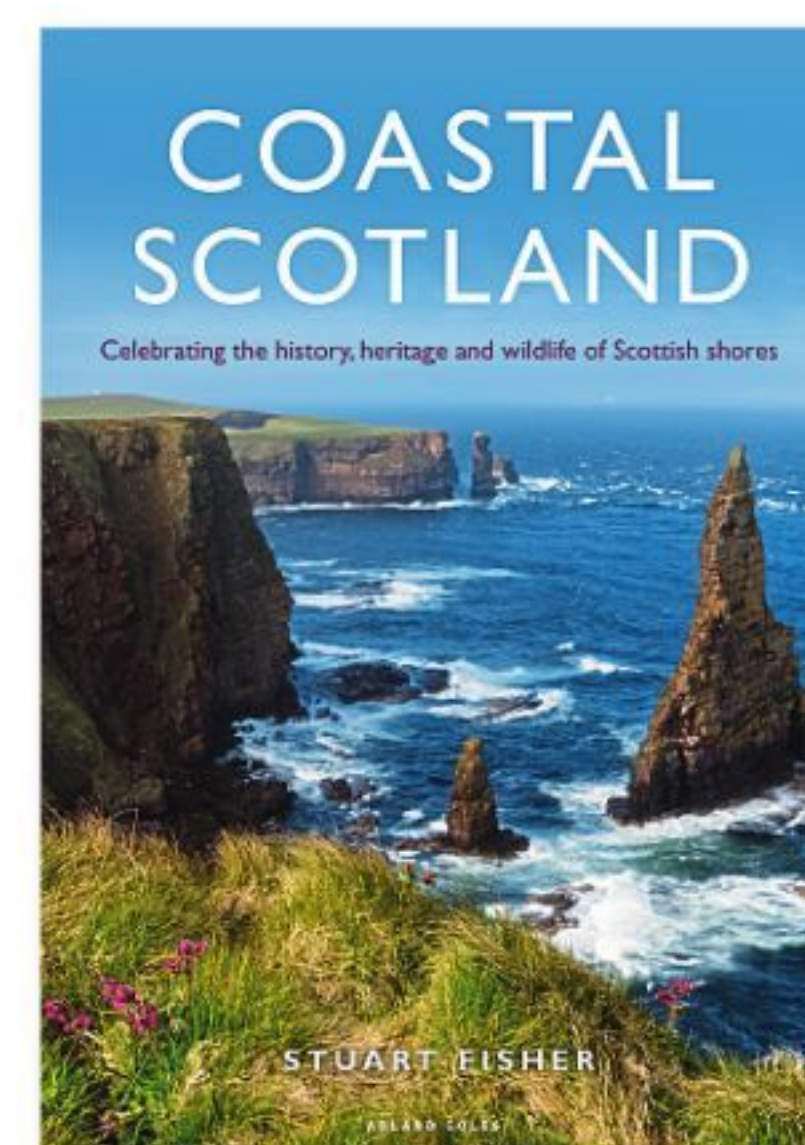
The Pocket Book of Bird Anatomy

● By Marianne Taylor

Published by Bloomsbury, priced **£15.99 paperback**

This excellent RSPB guide to bird anatomy looks at the avian body system by system, how it evolved, and how it functions. Chapters explore traits that are unique to birds, including their trimmed-down skeleton, and how feathers permit flight and provide weatherproofing.

Featuring more than 300 diagrams and photographs, this beautiful, detailed guide also looks at the human impact on the avian world and reveals how behaviour and anatomy work together to produce these vibrant living beings that inspire us so much.



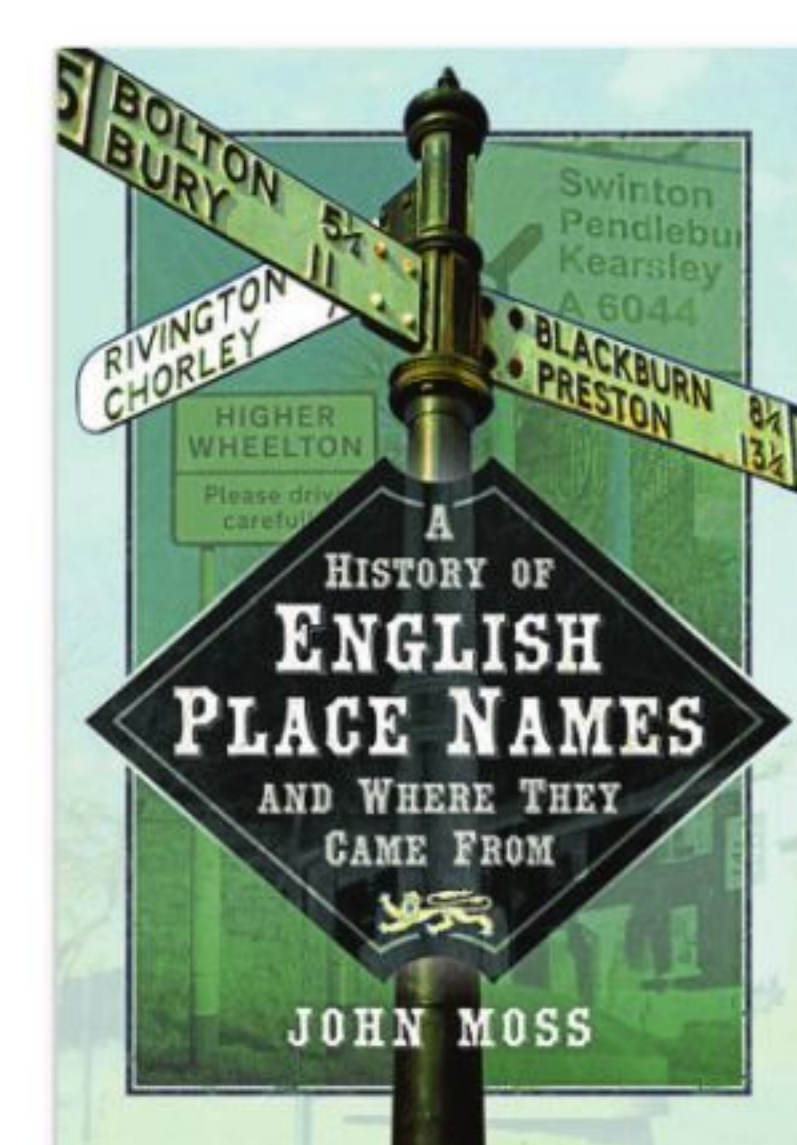
Coastal Scotland

● By Stuart Fisher

Published by Adlard Coles, priced **£25 paperback**

With nearly 800 islands and several thousand miles of coastline, Scotland has one of the most diverse coasts in all of Europe. *Coastal Scotland* journeys around the varied shorelines to complete the most comprehensive survey ever taken.

From rugged countryside edging the Highlands to modern cities, the book explores history and heritage, striking architecture, and wildlife. With detailed maps and evocative photography, *Coastal Scotland* will have readers itching to explore this rich and fascinating stretch of coast.



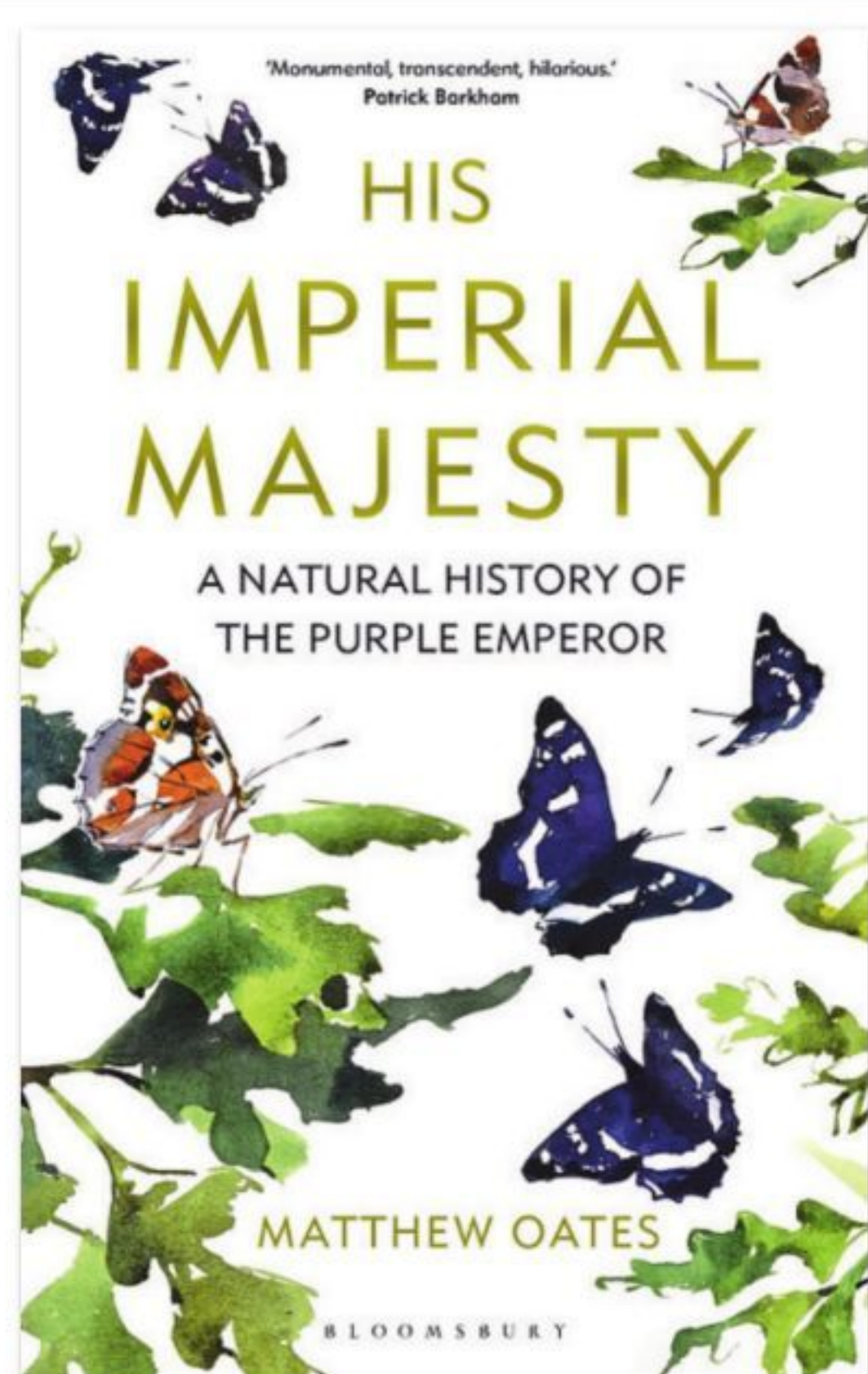
A History of English Place Names and Where They Came From

● By John Moss

Published by Pen and Sword Books, priced **£25 hardback**

Did you know that Hornsea comes from old Norse words meaning 'lake with a horn-shaped peninsula'? Or that Peterborough used to be called Medeshamstede after a man called Mede, an Anglo-Saxon man who worked the land?

Whatever their origin, our place names are inextricably bound to our history. This fascinating book is ideal for dipping in and out of as you travel around England to places new and familiar, helping you to understand why places were so named and by whom.



Book of the month

His Imperial Majesty

A Natural History of the Purple Emperor

● By Matthew Oates, Published by Bloomsbury, priced **£20 hardback**

This fascinating account sets out to explore one of Britain's most captivating butterfly species, the Purple Emperor. A wondrous enigma, this beautiful, bold butterfly is one of our most elusive and least-known - we glimpse it only occasionally in its treetop world, and it has fascinated us for centuries. Author Matthew Oates became captivated by the Purple Emperor following his first sightings as a boy. He has studied it closely ever since, devoting his life to trying to unravel the Emperor's secrets.

His Imperial Majesty takes us on a journey, looking at all aspects of the insect's lifecycle, including habitat, behaviour and its conservation, all told in a witty and informative style that draws you in and envelops you in the charming world of the king of British butterflies.

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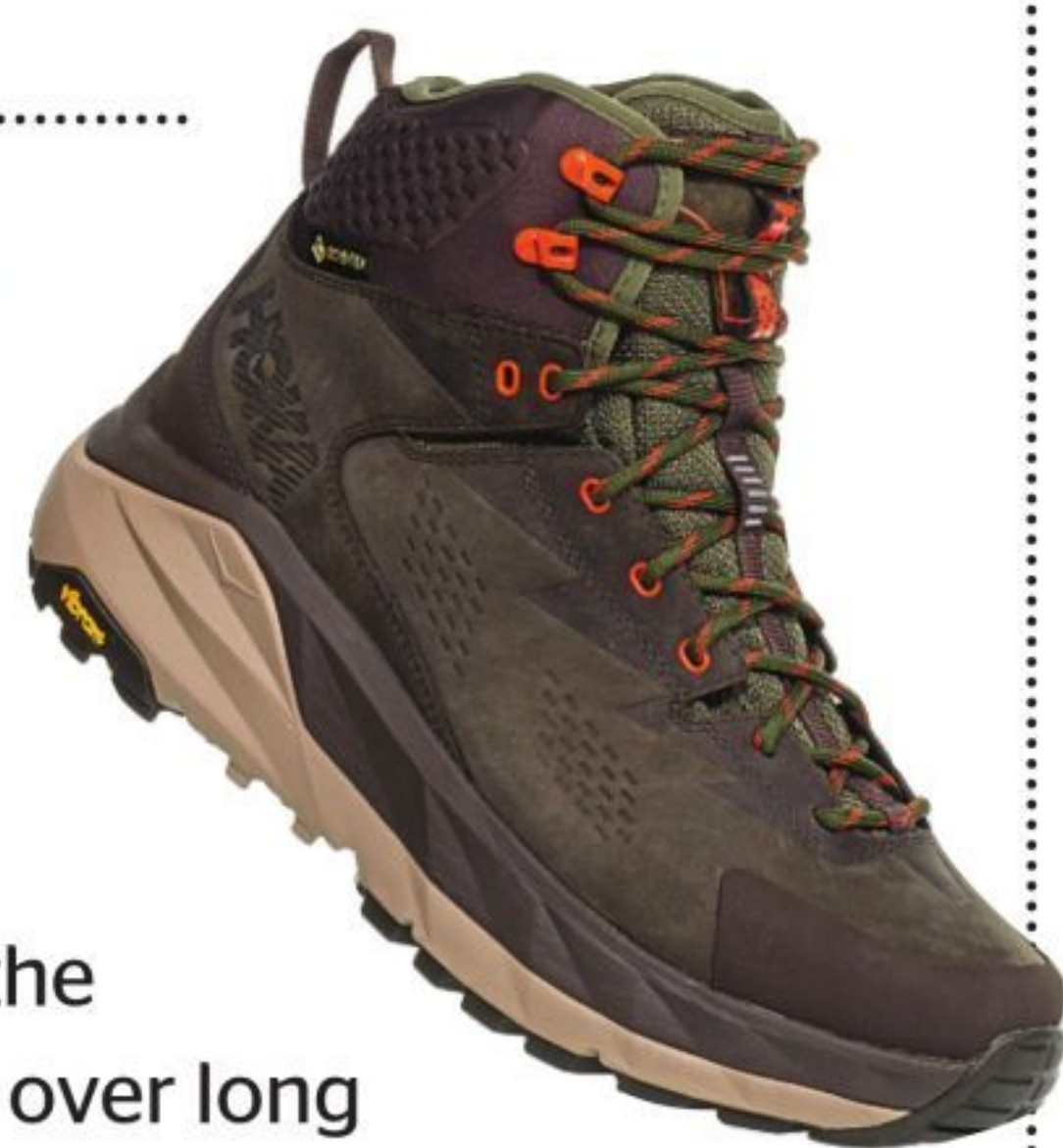


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The secret life of the kingfisher

Artist and photographer **Robert Fuller** was privileged to watch the intimate details of the lives of a pair of kingfishers. Here's the remarkable story of how he did it



By Robert Fuller
Robert is an wildlife artist and photographer with a gallery in the Yorkshire Wolds

UNDERCOVER: Robert is experienced in using hides to capture, on camera, wildlife in its natural habitat, which he then exquisitely paints

AS AN ARTIST, I'VE SPENT MANY HOURS wading through streams to watch and photograph kingfishers for my paintings. I find the vivid palette of iridescent blues and oranges in their plumage irresistible and, over the years, I've built up quite a collection of kingfisher paintings inspired by my observations.

But I've always longed to know what happens when these bright birds disappear underground to bring up their young in the dark.

So, when a land-owning friend complained about the collapse of a bank where kingfishers regularly nest, I grabbed the opportunity this presented and offered to restore the bank in exchange for setting up a hide to photograph their nest.

And so began an ambitious plan to build not just a hide, but also an artificial nesting chamber fitted with hidden cameras so that I could film the secret world of kingfishers inside their nest.

Made from a papier mache mould of a balloon and plastic piping, and coated in a mixture of glue,



cement, earth and fine tree roots, I placed this secret nest box inside a garden shed.

The rest of the shed housed a CCTV camera system and space for me to sit and film the action. Like the artificial nesting chamber, I coated the entire shed in my mud and tree root blend so it would look like a natural continuation of my friend's flooded gravel pit bank.

With the help of two friends, I placed the entire construction in situ over three freezing February days, long before the start of the breeding season.

Remarkably, just a few weeks afterwards, a pair of kingfishers moved in. Photographing kingfishers is a delicate operation; one false move and they can flee. So, to avoid disturbing these birds in the early stages of nesting, I restricted my visits to after dark when I would scan furtively through the CCTV footage.

Mostly, the cameras showed the female as she coughed up and carefully shredded pellets over the nest floor. Over time she was able to fashion a scape into this debris.

There was no footage of the pair together in the





nest, but this didn't surprise me. Kingfishers are essentially solitary birds and have to overcome a natural aversion to one another in order to breed.

When I eventually risked watching the pair from my hide, I noticed an awkward undertone to their courtship.

It began with the male's spectacular flying displays. I watched as he flew high into the sky, lapping the lakes below in ascending circles. Then he turned and plummeted towards the female, flying so close that the feathers on her head flattened in the slipstream. He landed near the nest entrance and instantly disappeared inside. Encouraged, she ventured in to take a look.

The next time I saw this pair they were sitting, side by side, three feet apart on a sweeping willow branch. The female shuffled towards the male, but he shuffled away, preferring to maintain an equal distance.

But later that day I heard them calling each other



NATURAL BEHAVIOUR:
A rare view of young kingfishers inside the nest

across the water, a sweetly hypnotic 'peeping' that pinged back and forth until the male dove to catch a fish, which he offered headfirst. She accepted with quivering wings and as she gulped it down he stood bolt upright, his tail fanned and sharp beak pointing skywards in a posture that was disturbingly similar to his aggressive stance.

Known as the 'fish pass', this marked a monumental stage in their relationship. Nevertheless, it took several days and several more fish passes before he eventually hovered over her to mate.

I noticed he crudely grasped the feathers above her eye with his beak as he did so.

A few days later, I switched on the monitor in the hide to find one beautiful, shiny white egg. Kingfishers lay every 24 hours and so I was back before dawn the next day.

There was a rustle as she waddled up the tunnel and I watched her feel her way through the darkness with her beak and locate her egg with a gentle tap before settling down on it.



Her tail pumped up and down for an hour as she laboured, then she stood and scuffled out of the nest revealing two eggs side by side. She went on to lay seven pristine eggs, each as precious as pearls and I had been sitting alongside her for six of them.

For the following 20 days, the pair shared brooding duties, but as hatching day approached it was clear that the female preferred to be in charge. When the male arrived for his shift, she rushed at him and their long beaks locked like swords as they duelled; the eggs scattering.

Then I noticed the male enter the chamber with a tiny fish clasped in his beak. He rasped loudly and the female rocked briefly to one side to reveal

six eggs and one freshly hatched chick.

All seven eggs hatched successfully and the adults worked tirelessly to provide food for their fast-growing and increasingly-mobile young. But then a cold front lasting three long days swept in and three chicks sadly perished.

I continued to watch as the surviving chicks grew steely silver feather pins which eventually turned into this species' distinctive brilliant plumage.

On the day they fledged, the parents refused to feed them and flew downstream instead.

One by one, the chicks followed the sound, down the tunnel and out of the bank. I felt a pang of pride as all four fledglings took to the air. ♣

MATING: The 'fish pass' is a vital part of kingfisher courtship, which Robert was able to capture on film

How I made a kingfisher nestbox

Kingfishers dig a long, sloping tunnel through soil with their sharp beaks, then excavate a globe-shaped chamber where the female lays her eggs.

I decided to replicate this by turning a shed into an artificial river bank, with a kingfisher nest hidden inside it.

My nestbox was a metre long. The nest chamber was made from a mould of a balloon covered in papier-mache and the tunnel from a mould made from a 5cm plastic drainpipe.

I created the nest box with cement, sand, peat, PVA glue and fine tree roots to make it seem as natural as possible.

I also covered the shed with this material, sloping the wall of the shed outwards and curving it at the top to mimic the overhang of a natural bank to prevent predators from entering.



**RARELY SEEN:**

Robert captures amazing images of the kingfisher mum with her newly-hatched chicks

**STUNNING**

ARTWORK: Robert's beautiful images of kingfishers are testament to the time he has spent watching and photographing them in their natural habitat

● To see more of Robert's wildlife art, visit: robertefuller.com

How to see kingfishers

- Kingfishers live along clean waterways, so start your search here.
- You are most likely to see them in spring and summer, and they are particularly active in early morning.
- Listen out for the sound of them coming. You'll often hear the piercing 'peep-peep' of a kingfisher before you see it.
- They will habitually return to favourite perches to fish from, so scan any protruding twigs and branches that hang over the water.
- Be patient. Anglers often see kingfishers because they sit quietly by riverbanks for long periods.
- But don't get too close: remember, kingfishers are a Schedule 1 Bird, so it's illegal to disturb them at their nest site without a special licence from Natural England.

**How to encourage kingfishers**

Kingfishers are amber listed because of their unfavourable conservation status in Europe. They are also listed as a Schedule 1 species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, offering them additional protection.

If you don't have kingfishers nesting, you can always provide a nest site for them:

- Kingfishers nest in vertical mud banks at least three feet high with little or no vegetation on it. Check your streams or riverbanks in January when the vegetation is low to see if there is a suitable bank for them to nest in.
- If you do have a suitable bank, make sure it is clear of vegetation, particularly brambles as well as other debris. Do this in early February to minimise disturbance in the breeding season.
- If your river bank slopes, you can straighten a suitable three-metre section. You don't need heavy machinery - a spade will do the job relatively easily.
- And along with a nest, provide perches for kingfishers to hunt from: these need to be solid, firm perches that overlook clear, slow-moving water inhabited by small fish.
- A kingfisher will use anything as a perch, but if there are any convenient tree branches, then cut them clear so there is space for the birds to land on and dive from. Bridges and walls also make perfect perches if they are in the right place.

Make your own kingfisher perch:

- Knock a sturdy post into the ground.
- Attach a horizontal branch extending four feet above the water. A hazel is particularly good as it is hard-wearing.
- Wait to see if it's accepted. If you notice your perching branch is smooth in one place, especially if any powdery green algae has been worn away, this means it's being used. There might be evidence of fish scales, too.



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When did you last...?

Clare Hunt takes a sideways look at some of the olden ways that we might be able to incorporate into our modern lives



By Clare Hunt
Clare is a writer
and smallholder
novice enjoying the
good(ish) life
in Devon

IN 1942, AS WAR RAGED, the British government published its now-famous 'Make Do and Mend' pamphlet. Part of a series of initiatives designed to eke out scarce resources, it summed up a philosophy of resourcefulness and frugality. In today's more consumerist world, there's a lot to learn from this wisdom. Is it time we asked ourselves when we last did something to avoid waste and make the most of what we've got?

With the 75th anniversary of VE day falling during the Covid-19 lockdown, it was easy to draw parallels between the two periods. At both times, 'normal' life stopped and everyday reality was transformed.

In 2020, we felt vulnerable – and not just to the virus. Reliant on supermarkets and online shops, we wondered if there'd be food on the shelves and if the Amazon driver would still come.

Wartime privation meant everything had at least two, probably three lives before it was

considered spent. But since the end of the war, Britain has lived high on the hog. Stuff – from food to electronics – is abundant, encouraging a culture of waste. Disposability rules and it's become unfashionable to be frugal.

But with an increasing focus on the environment and society re-evaluating its priorities, maybe we should rewind to a time when we didn't have everything we wanted. With a splash of inventiveness and some bits and bobs, we might have been able to make it ourselves.

Ask yourself – when did you last darn a sock? When did you last go foraging, or make something with salvaged materials? Can the satisfaction of being self-reliant, making things ourselves, and using resources in a thrifty way take over from the temptation of new-and-shiny things? There are lots of ways you can reintroduce a waste-not-want-not attitude into your household. Try a few – maybe you'll catch the make-do-and-mend bug. ►

Around the home

In the 1950s, time-saving domestic appliances liberated us from the labour-intensive drudgery of housework. No one wants to return to a time when doing the laundry took up half the week, but there are some old-school housekeeping tips we'd do well to remember. When did you last...?

Clean-as-you-go: if spills, stains and general grubbiness are attended to immediately – before they get ground in – they can often be easily dealt with using soapy water.

Ditch the chemical clutter: you can get most of the household cleaning done with distilled white vinegar, bicarbonate of soda and bleach (for disinfecting). Oh, and a smidgeon of elbow grease. A small tub of bicarb left in the fridge is also an effective way to control whiffy food odours - look to replace every three months.

Clean windows with newspapers: readily available and recyclable, newspaper acts as a gentle abrasive to clean off dirt while absorbing liquid and polishing panes to a streak-free finish. Use a spray of equal parts white vinegar and water as your cleaner.

Salvage saucepans: to remove charred food or stubborn stains, make a runny paste of baking soda and water in the bottom of your pot. Bring it just to the boil, then leave it to cool, before giving the pan a good scrub with the soda solution and a nylon brush. Non-abrasive baking soda is safe to use on all sorts of pans.

Squeeze out every drop: you might know there's something left in a bottle or tube, but squeezing it out is another matter. Snip the end off the tube and scrape the remnants into a screw-top jar or replace the top of a pump bottle with a flip-top.



Turn off the lights: flicking the switch in unoccupied rooms saves energy and extends the life of bulbs. Have a scout about and you'll find other energy-sappers – from laptops on standby to chargers left plugged in. Setting the washing machine on unnecessarily hot cycles, starting the dishwasher when it isn't full and constantly opening the fridge are other common money wasters.

Save rags: if you're just wiping the worktop, any bog-standard cloth will do. Keeping a rag bag is an out-of-fashion habit that gives worn-out clothes a second life. Cotton T-shirts are perfect candidates. Pants maybe less so.



In the garden

In wartime, every scrap of land was exploited and gardeners had to be innovative, resourceful and super-productive. Whether you have a windowsill or a rambling acreage, frugal-gardening opportunities abound. When did you last...?

Collect rainwater: a simple butt gathers a handy amount of water to keep thirsty pots satisfied. And, as rainwater is untainted by tap-water chemicals, plants prefer it.

Take cuttings and save seeds: it's easy to splurge at the garden centre, but it's equally simple to take cuttings and save seeds. Find a like-minded group

of gardening friends to enjoy different varieties by swapping what you've propagated.

Get composting: homemade compost is rich, productive and waste-neutralising. Set up a system, give nature time to work her magic then congratulate yourself on turning something yucky into something lovely.



Diversify in your borders: when you need just a sprinkle or sprig of herbs, it's less wasteful to pick a few leaves than buy a whole bag. Pop a few favourite varieties into your flower border or window box. And you'll find constant picking makes them even more productive.



Behind the wardrobe doors

The iconic 'Make Do and Mend' pamphlet was published in response to the challenges presented by clothes rationing. Necessarily, dressmaking in the 1940s used fabric sparingly. A happy side-effect of this was a chic, tailored look that's become a classic. In today's fast-fashion world, we could learn a thing or two. So when did you last...?

Take proper care of clothes: it sounds obvious, but garment life can be extended by regular airing, careful hanging to avoid creasing and doing up fasteners to maintain shape. Reinforcing thin spots before laundering stops rips appearing, while tending to stains immediately prevents them from setting in.

Manage moths: preying most commonly on wool, but not averse to any natural fibre, moth grubs have voracious appetites. Take preventative methods to stop them by brushing or beating garments before airing them in direct sunlight. Never hang damp or sweaty items in the wardrobe, use a hot iron (as is appropriate for the fabric) to kill eggs and keep closets and drawers scrupulously clean and dry.

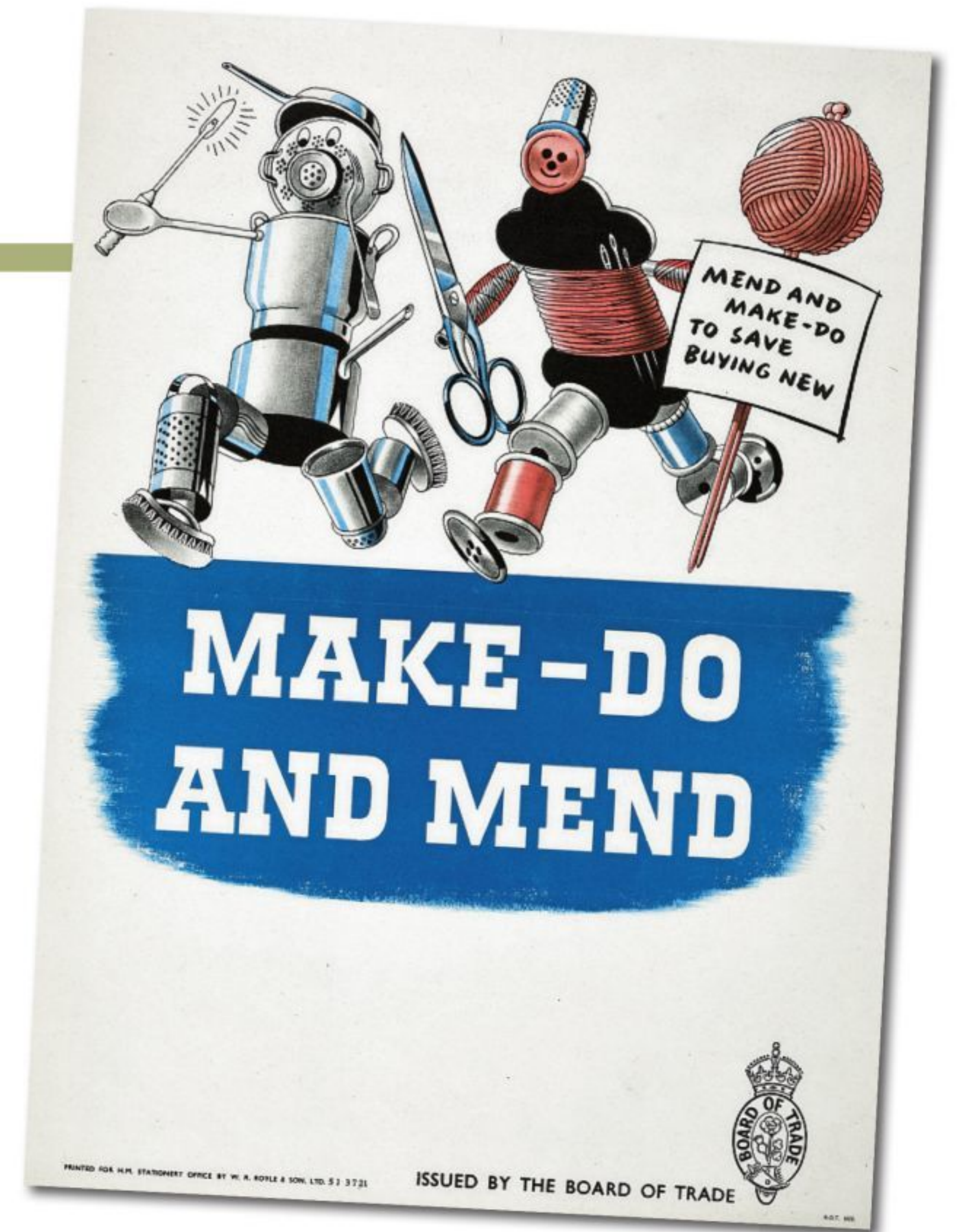
Sew a stitch in time: attending to a hole with a judicious stitch or decorative patch can easily control it. When you can buy 10 pairs of synthetic socks for a fiver, it's apparent why sock darning has fallen out of fashion. But if you're a wearer of cosy wool socks, darning should still be on the agenda.



Recycle grow-bags: at the end of the growing season, decompact depleted grow bags and give them a second chance by teasing-out roots and adding seaweed or poultry-poo fertiliser. You can then produce a second crop such as winter salads, use the soil as a top dressing for next spring's seeds or even keep it on hand for fiddly lawn repairs.

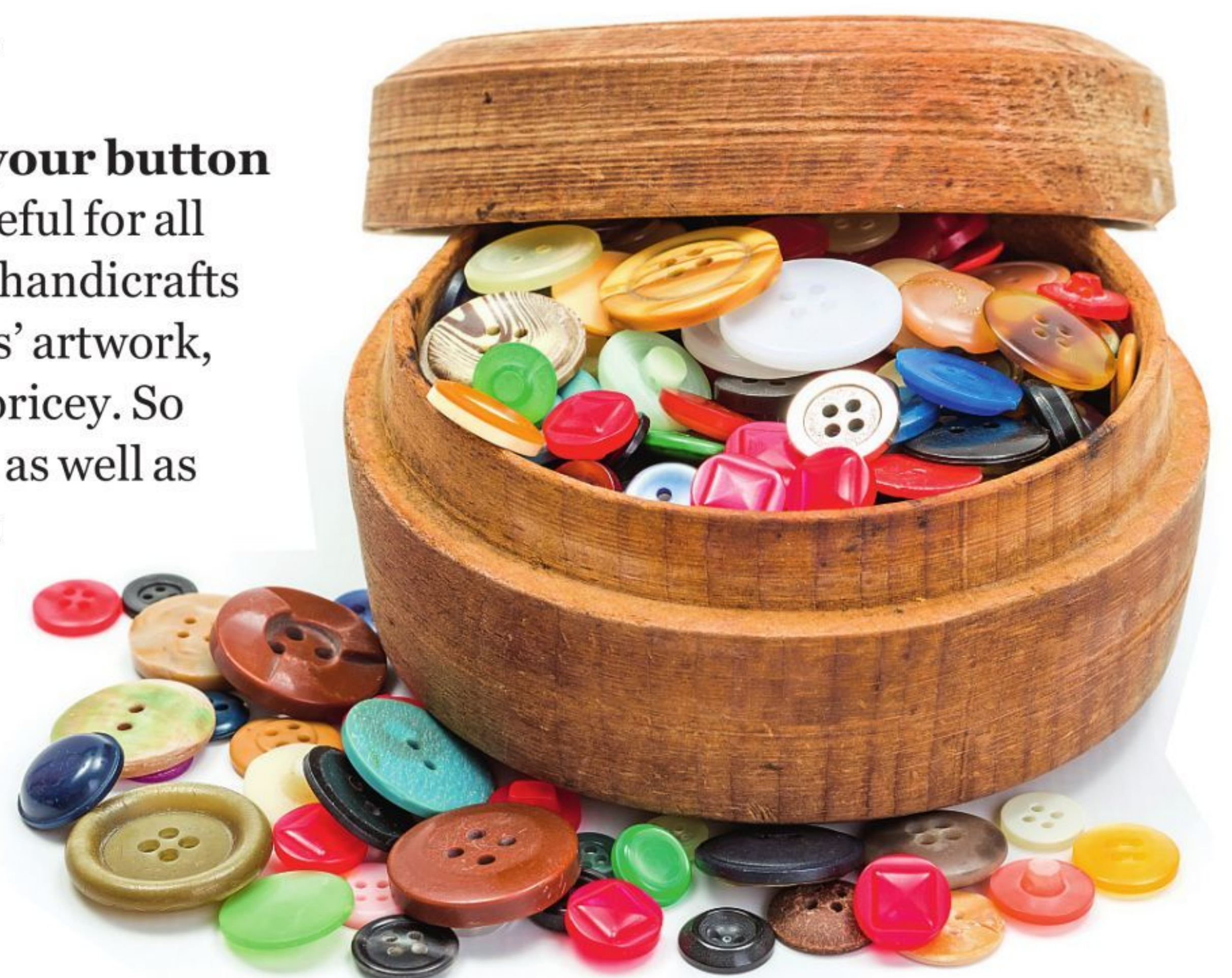
haberdashery can be pricey. So remove buttons, beads and fancy trims, as well as zips and fixings, from any garments you discard, and save for another day.

Polish with fruit: by rubbing the inside of a banana peel over your shoes then buffing them up as usual, you'll achieve an unparalleled sheen. As well as an intriguing fruity aroma.



Reuse and repurpose: lots of energy goes into textile manufacture, be it natural or synthetic. Hand-stitched quilts use up small or awkward remnants, while larger pieces (such as curtains) can be transformed into dresses. Gone off last season's sweater? Unravel it and knit a new one. Frayed collar on your shirt? Unpick the neckline, flip the collar so the side that was underneath becomes the top, then sew it back on.

Boost your button box: useful for all sorts of handicrafts and kids' artwork,





Eat, drink and be frugal

During the war, food waste was inconceivable. Today, for some, it's a way of life, with British households wasting millions of tons of food every year. When did you last...?

Make a plan: write a menu for the week and buy ingredients accordingly – this cuts down on impulse purchases. Make ready meals for busy evenings by batch-cooking soups and stews for the freezer.

Go local: small greengrocers that sell loose fruit and veg let you take only what you need. A 5kg bag of spuds from the supermarket might seem good value, but will you actually use them?

Keep it for later: food preservation is as old as time, so get pickling, preserving, jamming and drying. Old bread can be crumbed and frozen, every type of veg transformed into chutney and bones bubbled into nutritious broths.



Take advantage of your freezer:

half-full freezers waste energy, so fill yours up. But freezers can be places where good intentions go to die, so keep a list of what's in there, make sure you package everything properly and label it clearly – there's no way you'll recognize it otherwise.

Go foraging: there's free food out there – literally growing on trees. Berries are the obvious foraging starting point, but keep your eyes peeled for plums, apples and pears, too. No scrumping, though – always ask permission before picking. More adventurous foragers can also turn their hand to herbs, salads and mushrooms.



Make-your-own household cleaner

In a repurposed spray bottle, mix three parts distilled or apple-cider vinegar with one part water. Add a good splosh of lemon or lime juice. Both vinegar and citrus are excellent grease-busting cleaners and the juice gives this solution a fresh scent. You can experiment with essential oils, too, if you fancy trying different aromas.



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Reach for the skies

Nicola Stocken looks at the myriad ways to add vertical interest to your garden



Words by:
Nicola Stocken
Nicola travels
all over the UK
photographing
and writing about
outstanding gardens

SO MUCH attention in gardening is focused earthwards - on digging, planting and weeding - that it often takes a conscious effort to look up. To think about adding vertical interest through tall structures, climbing plants and tree canopies.

Height is an essential dimension of a garden's layout which, existing largely on the horizontal, could otherwise appear flat and uninspiring.

There's a wide range of upright features to choose from - arbours and bowers that become both a support for climbers and a sheltered spot for relaxing; decorative buildings; or pergolas and arches that form overhead structures to link different areas, leading both eye and foot, and promoting a feeling of movement. All these elements enrich the overall picture with diverse layers, whilst changes in floor level - raised or sunken - add further variation.

When taller structures are integrated into the permanent framework, they not only create beautiful features - whether stripped bare or clothed in climbers - but also hide unwanted sights such as work areas or a neighbour's rotting fence. A pergola or gazebo smothered in plants creates privacy from overlooking windows, and keeps out prying eyes. Meanwhile, unattractive views beyond the garden's boundaries are easily hidden behind a well-placed specimen tree.

In tiny gardens, adding height with a combination of plants supported by airy frames, living walls of greenery and shelving is a great way of expanding the potential growing area within a

**CREATIVE
USE OF SPACE:**
Garden shelving with a
display of young plants,
succulents and annuals



SCREENED: Pleached *Carpinus* trees, underplanted with *Geranium psilostemon*, line a gravel path

confined area. However, in larger plots, elongated arrangements such as pergolas, trellis, pleached trees or hedges can be used to divide up the space. Clearly defining different areas in this way creates a series of linked 'rooms', each stamped with its own personality, and intimate feel.

Pleaching trees is an effective means of dividing a garden into 'rooms', marking pathways and enclosing secluded spaces in a manner that filters light in, whilst veiling distractions out. Suitable trees include hornbeam, crab apples, pears or limes which, once trained onto frames, form tall leafy screens.

Leaving the trunks bare for around two metres reduces the leafy shadows cast, fostering good growing conditions in the ground below.

Every garden needs specimen trees to gaze up into, silhouetted against the sky to display their shapely winter forms, spring blossom, summer foliage or autumn fruits. Trees come in a huge range of forms and colours, ranging from myriad greens to greys, silvers, purples or red tints.

Size also varies greatly, from mighty oaks, beeches or walnuts that need space, to compact ornamental trees such as Japanese maples, jacquemontii birches, kousa dogwoods, the wedding cake tree or Eastern redbud. Each has specific requirements in terms of soil type, moisture, sun or shade.

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The background is key, because if it's messy or underwhelming, it could wreck the overall picture

Taller, diaphanous trees such as robinias or acacias are fast-growing, ideal for draping above ornamental buildings. Graceful gazebos and follies date back to the 18th century, created as either focal or viewing points. Some are built traditionally from brick or stone, whilst others are made from bamboo, for example, woven hazel, ironwork or clapboard.

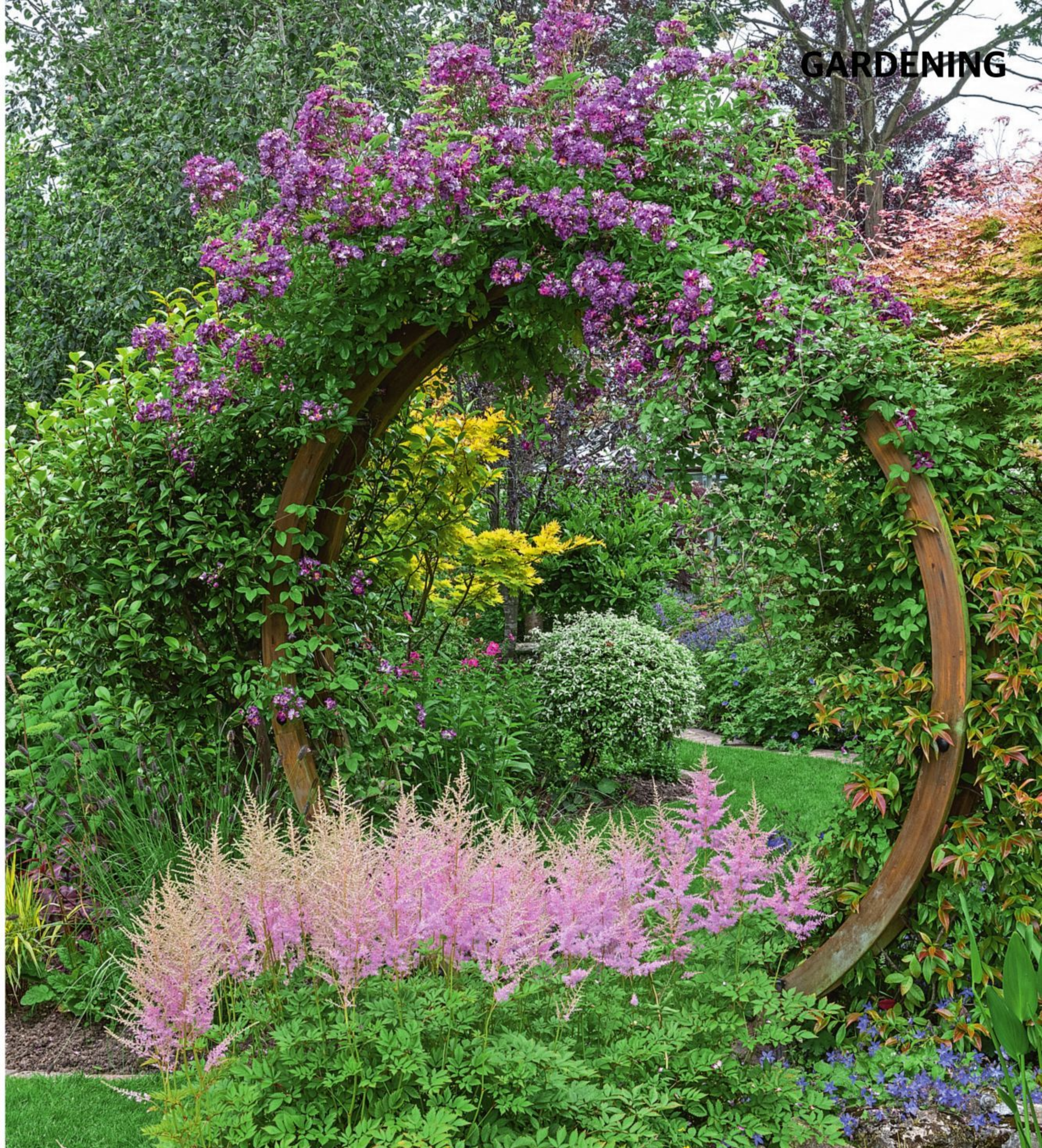
However, whatever the materials or style, these structures draw the eye, so need careful positioning within a scheme to ensure they are in keeping with their surroundings - the background is key because if it's messy or underwhelming, it could wreck the overall picture.

Posts and pillars

Pergolas are wonderfully versatile structures that can be expanded or reduced in size to stretch from several to many metres in length. They're equally at home straddling a long path in a sizeable garden, as being shoehorned into a small plot and attached to a boundary wall. The only restriction on scaling down a pergola is that the height must be sufficient for an adult to walk upright.

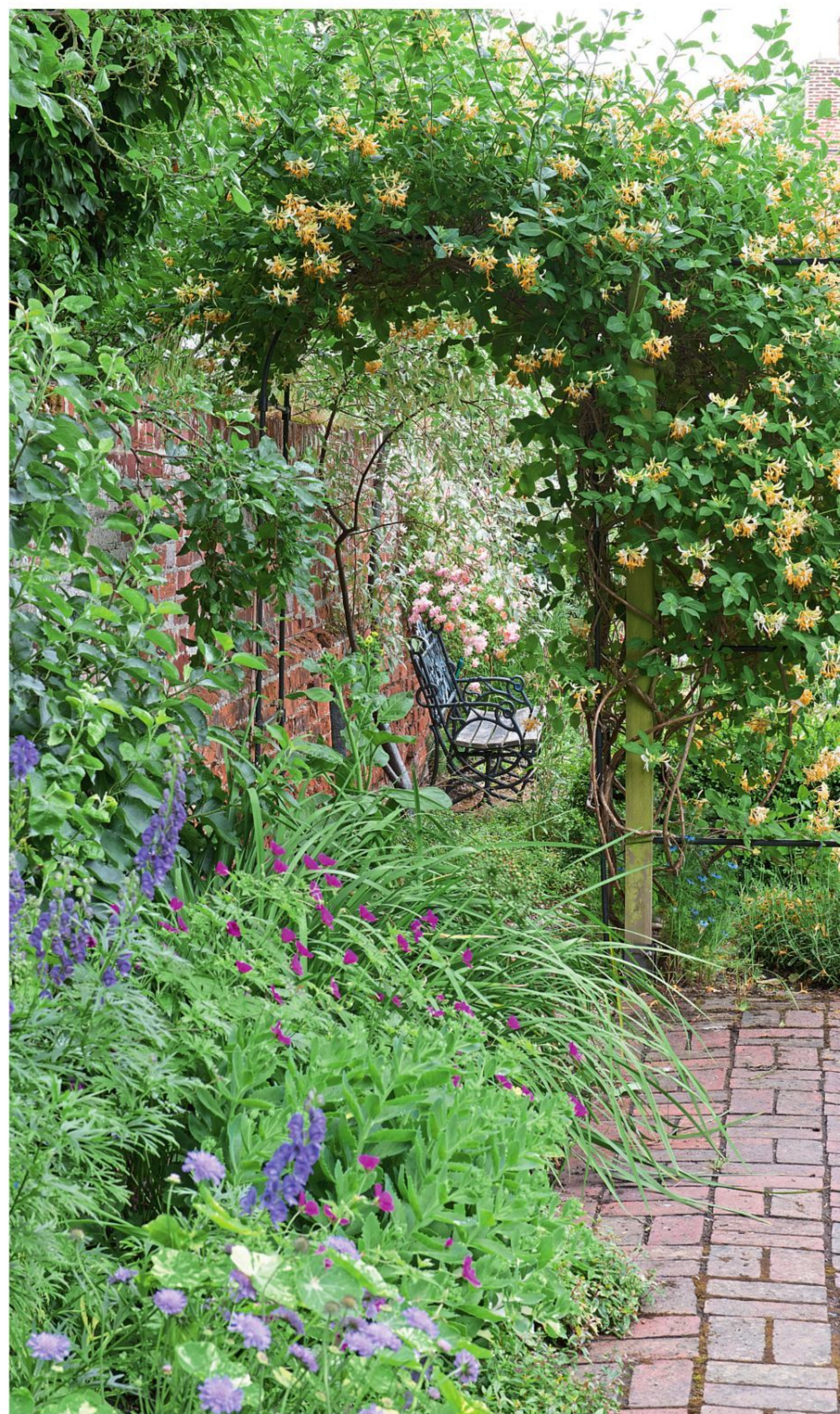
In smaller spaces, both pergolas and arches should be built in proportion with the setting so as not to dominate. In a narrow, rectangular plot, it may seem counter-intuitive to offset the structure to one side, but placing it centrally splits the garden into two long, unappealing slices of ground, directing the eye straight to the rear boundary.

The effect of the spacing between uprights then comes into sharp focus – close spacing gives a



MOON GATE:
Seen over a clump of pink astilbes, an arch clad in Rosa 'Veilchenblau' frames a view of herbaceous borders

A SPACE TO RELAX:
Below, a patio seating area with a vine-covered pergola surrounded by terracotta containers





Prickly roses use their thorns like mini crampons

tunnel-like impression, whereas wider intervals between uprights resembles a series of windows that frame views of the garden beyond. The uprights are in full view, so be aware that both the design and material suggest a specific style. Timber posts can be crafted to look rustic, contemporary or simply elegant, whilst stone columns are distinctly classical and brick piers have a certain formality. The ultimate choice should reflect any existing architectural styles.

Meanwhile, increasing the frequency of a pergola's cross-beams gives greater support to climbing plants, boosting the shade beneath.

On a practical note, it's vital to balance a pergola's size and strength of build against the eventual size of any climbers, once fully mature. Roses such as 'Rambling Rector' or 'Kiftsgate' can reaching heights upwards of 14 metres, engulfing and toppling any support that's not up to the job. Tie in regularly, twisting stems around the supports, and securing with biodegradable strings which will slowly decay, without restricting developing stems. Trim back unruly, spreading stems little and often, preventing the plant from getting out of control.

Up, up and away

Climbers use different means of clinging to their supports, and understanding the process makes it easier to ensure they are securely held in place.

Prickly roses, for example, use their thorns like mini crampons; many clematis reach upwards via twisting leaf stems; vines and sweet peas entrap their supports with coiling tendrils. Then again, ivies and climbing hydrangeas have aerial roots that cling, whilst honeysuckles and wisterias grasp at anything going! Attaching wire-coated chickenwire to the surface provides a foothold – leave a 5cm air space behind to allow for airflow. Alternatively, run stainless steel straining wires between vine eyes set at 1.5-metre intervals.

All these climbers, and more, thrive on free-standing arches. Coming in a wide variety of styles, crafted from brick, stone, wood or metal, many arches are sufficiently wide to loop over a garden path and frame a view from either direction.

The combination of an ornamental arch's silhouette softened by climbing plants creates a lovely feature. For a long flowering season, plant repeat-flowering climbing roses with mid-season clematis such as 'Guernsey Cream' or 'Princess Diana' – for a lovely blend, try pink Rosa 'Queen of Denmark' with mauvish blue Clematis Prince



GARDEN THRONE: A cat basks in the summer sun in a living willow arbour



IN HARMONY: A delicate combination of light pink Rosa Queen of Denmark with mauvish blue Clematis Prince Charles in summer

Charles. But avoid swamping an arch by choosing climbing roses with a maximum height of around three metres – 'Gertrude Jekyll', 'Falstaff' or 'The Pilgrim' make great impact.

Bowers and arbours not only provide secluded, peaceful spots for sitting, but the loveliest add an alluring architectural element that enhances both traditional and contemporary settings.

Timber arbours come in a wide range of styles, some angular, others curving, contemporary or traditional. The timber can be left natural, or finished in a colour that co-ordinates with existing woodwork. Wrought iron models tend to be classical in style, complementing period properties and formal gardens. The framework is minimalist, so they benefit from a covering of evergreens such as ivy or euonymus, tightly clipped to give form and substance, but without detracting from the delicacy of the design.

Arbours call out for fragrance – Rosa 'Albertine' is hard to beat, as are summer's sweet peas or spring's Akebia quinata, the chocolate vine which has a spicy fragrance with a hint of vanilla.

Cool leafy retreats can also be created from living willow stems – known as 'wands' – and used as leafy arbours, tightly-clipped arches and shady play dens for children. Planted in winter, willow wands are fast-growing and easily woven



FOCAL POINT: An obelisk stands in an exuberant border of *Allium nigrum*, Papaver Patty's Plum, foxgloves, scabious, and *Alchemilla mollis*

together to form a leafy canopy, ideal for natural garden forms. It really is as simple as pushing cut willow wands directly into the ground, weaving them together, and watering whilst they establish. Most willow hideaways need two people to build, making it a sociable activity and fun weekend project for all the family.

The simplest way of injecting height, and either summer flower power or winter permanence, is to install a handsome obelisk plant support and partly cover it in small climbers such as sweet peas, black-eyed Susan or Ipomoea 'Heavenly Blue'.

Available in heights varying from waist-high to two or more metres, obelisks come in a variety of styles and finishes. There are rusted iron models that harmonise with bright colours and greens, black painted metal to contrast, or wooden versions - either with a natural finish, or stained to match other garden furnishings.

Used singly, an obelisk creates a stylish focal point to place at the end of a path, in the centre of square flower bed or middle of a circular courtyard. Balanced in pairs to each side of a path, doorway or bench, for example, the effect is formal. And, repeated along the length of a border, at regular intervals, obelisks introduce a sense of rhythm and a design framework that binds the planting together.

For a rustic look, there are wigwams made from woven willow, hazel or from bamboo canes bound together. 🌿



Adding vertical interest to a garden

Award-winning garden designer Will Williams advises that whether you live in a small city flat or a large country home, an outdoor space can be transformed by looking up.

"Using the empty space above your plot will make your garden feel a whole lot bigger," he notes.

Trees are the first consideration, not only to add height and stretch the garden vertically, but also to lend a lovely dappled shade.

"For smaller specimen trees, try planting in pots, giving them a little more height, and stretching them even further."

As important are mid-range shrubs, the plants that fill the space above small planting, but below tree canopies.

For a similar effect, use structures such as a garden room or a pergola. "Whether sheltering an informal seating area or providing a more formal walkway, pergolas are a great way to create a climbing frame for planting to play through," he suggests.

Wherever practical, Will recommends a green roof. "These can be quite discreet, such as one clothed in sedum, adding colour and interest whilst also providing another habitat for wildlife to explore."

Then, if the planting in a bed or border feels rather flat, perhaps look at using obelisks. "These can be used in a very sophisticated way to instantly add formality, or simply give the planting a bit of 'oomph'."



Sylvia gets active again with turmeric supplements

YOU may have heard wellness warriors talking about turmeric, only to be left wondering how the popular household spice had garnered such a following.

But the truth is, they're onto something. More and more people are sticking with turmeric after trying it for themselves.

FutureYou Cambridge, a leading nutritional supplement company, has received praise for their Turmeric+ supplements thanks to a special formulation that allows more of the active ingredient to get where it is needed.

Curcumin is the active ingredient in turmeric, but unfortunately it is difficult for the body to absorb - meaning that powdered turmeric sold in the supermarket isn't suitable. FutureYou Cambridge's Turmeric+ formulation is 30x more absorbable than standard turmeric, and also contains vitamin C which contributes to normal collagen formation for the normal function of cartilage.

"The difference it made was unbelievable"

The impressive formula was developed in Cambridge, a city known across the globe for its academic and medical excellence. Each one of FutureYou's supplements is backed by a scientific advisory board that includes pharmacist, nutritionist and author Aidan Goggins BPharm,

MSc Nutr Med, and Dr Nicholas Shenker, a leading rheumatologist and chronic pain expert at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

The results of Turmeric+ speak for themselves, with thousands more people signing up for a regular supply in 2019.

Sylvia Pilgrim from Manchester is one of the long-term subscribers. Now in her sixties, Sylvia has always liked to keep fit.

'I am retired now, but even when I was working I always liked to stay fit. Unfortunately, I began to slow down due to wear and tear,' she says.

'I had seen the advertisements for Turmeric+ but thought it was just another fad, then I thought I had nothing to lose by trying it.

'The difference it made was unbelievable. I was able to work-out and can now continue with my fitness regime. I have been taking it for around two years now. My husband suggested I came off it as I was feeling so much more like my normal self - I told him I'd rather give him up than my turmeric tablets!'

'The strangest thing was, I happened to mention Turmeric+ to my doctor, when I went to the hospital for an unrelated issue. I couldn't believe it when he said that he was taking it too!'

To help other people find out if Turmeric+ is right for them, FutureYou Cambridge are offering people their first month's supply for free.



'We're very happy to give people their first pack for free so they can experience it for themselves,' says Adam Cleevely, the company's CEO.

'It might sound bonkers but it really isn't. We're that confident in the effectiveness of our formulation.

'I can't think of a better way to convince people. If they like it, they will stick with it. Tens of thousands of customers already do.'

TRY TURMERIC+ BEFORE YOU BUY IT

FUTUREYOU, a Cambridge nutraceutical company known for its popular turmeric supplement, has announced that it is offering new customers the chance to try its flagship product for just the cost of the £1.50 postage.* The formulation for Turmeric+ also contains vitamin C which contributes to normal collagen formation for the normal function of cartilage and bones. The company has built a large following of customers, most of whom are over 50. The offer is aimed at the over 50s, but is open to people of all ages. It comes after the Cambridge firm received a flurry of positive reviews for its product on Trustpilot, the independent online review platform.

"I will take these tablets for the rest of my days. Obviously I intend to be a VERY long term customer. Thank you so much"

'I have taken your Turmeric+ for two years now,' wrote one reviewer. 'I will take these tablets for the rest of my days. Obviously I intend to be a VERY long term customer.'

Thank you so much,' said another. Adam Cleevely, FutureYou's CEO, explains the thinking behind the offer: 'After receiving so much positive feedback on Turmeric+, our team is confident that people will love it within their first pack.

'So we've decided to offer that first pack for free, because our team is excited to spread the word about Turmeric+ with as many people as possible - as excited as our



customers, who often pass on Turmeric+ to their friends after experiencing it for themselves.'

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Give a hoot for tawny owls

Steve and Ann Toon are on the trail of this fascinating, but elusive predator



Words by: Steve and Ann Toon

Steve and Ann specialise in telling stories related to the natural world

BEAUTIFUL BIG EYES, gorgeous round face, neat body, chestnut brown finery; a real stunner if you're lucky enough to see one sitting out in the daytime.

But don't be dazzled completely by the tawny owl's dark-eyed beauty. Britain's best-known owl, responsible for the classic tu-whit-tu-who call we associate with the countryside after dark (it's actually a duet of a male and female – one tu-whits, the other tu-whoos), might appear as though butter wouldn't melt in its bill, but, come night-time, it's a fearsome, highly territorial predator keen to get its claws into a surprisingly varied selection of unwary prey.

Eerily silent in flight, and with vision and hearing highly-adapted for seeking out its eclectic dinner choices under cover of darkness, this powerful hunter drops noiselessly from its perch to surprise and seize upon a wide range of unwitting menu options (although it mostly likes to dine out on small mammals such as

“

They're top predators – eating anything smaller than themselves

rodents) before greedily swallowing its victims whole.

It can negotiate the trees in a woodland setting with amazing dexterity in flight and its well-developed, long talons enable it to lift and fly off with quite sizeable 'takeaway' meals with consummate ease.

“They're top predators eating anything smaller than themselves,” says Richard Cooper, CEO of the World Owl Trust (WOT). “Pound for pound, they're very efficient hunters and can survive on a huge variety of prey. They have the most eclectic diet out there, eating anything from insects to pigeons – even fish and other owls. I've seen one catch a half-grown rabbit and house martins from the eaves of our house.”

Enigmatic character

Tawnies are Britain's commonest owl, but there's lots we still need to learn about them if we're to keep it that way. And just because these native owls are common compared to other UK owl species doesn't really mean they're out of the woods when it comes to dealing with the bunch of threats they currently face. The problem is that it's tricky for conservationists to keep tabs on them – because tawnies are mostly active at night – and so pinning down the vital data to know how they're faring isn't easy.

“Tawny owl numbers are currently a bit of an enigma,” explains Richard. “There are approximately 50,000 of them, but they're classed as an amber species, which means they're at risk in conservation terms, due to poor breeding results and a decline in their range.”

Which is why the trust, and other national conservation bodies, are stepping up their efforts to remedy things and are calling on our help as budding citizen scientists to assist them to do so. The trust, for example, has recently launched a new app for its members to record all their sightings and records of owls, which will ultimately be linked to the trust's database.

The aim is that, over time, the project will build into a huge databank on owl populations in the UK to help in the trust's role of educating the public about owls and their place in the ecosystem. The aim is also to protect owl habitats that are at risk, as well as managing an 'ark' of captive owl species, which can be used to help wild populations survive or recover.



**STEALTHY:**

The tawny owl (*Strix aluco*), blends beautifully into its surroundings



“Even though tawny owls are the commonest owl here in the UK, they are difficult to breed in captivity. The trust took a long time to establish a breeding pair. Fudge is the trust’s ambassador tawny owl and he’s currently based at the South Staffordshire College Animal Zone at Rodbaston Campus, Wolverhampton,” Richard tells us.

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) is also currently undertaking a big citizen science campaign under the banner ‘Project Owl’ and is asking for the public’s help on a number of research projects, including finding out more about the tawny owl’s breeding behaviour and success rate. So far, more than 11,000 volunteers have taken part in this ongoing owl research.

“Developing targeted conservation strategies is tricky for tawny owls,” explains Richard. “They’re a difficult species to monitor, due to their nocturnal habits, good camouflage, and the fact that they don’t call all year round,” he says.

So why are these adaptable and skilled nocturnal hunters coming under threat? As with many wildlife

Tawny facts

- They have been known to hunt in Buckingham Palace gardens, visiting Her Majesty from nearby Hyde Park where they live.
- The well-known wildlife photographer Eric Hoskins lost an eye to a female tawny, who was protecting her nest in the era before photography at nest sites was frowned upon and, in some cases, subject to legal restrictions. He called his memoirs *An eye for a bird*.
- You know it’s night when watching a TV drama because they often use the call of a hooting tawny owl to signal it to us. The only thing is that they do this for Irish-set dramas on occasion too, which is misleading as tawny owls are not present in Ireland.
- There’s a huge amount of superstition around owls, including the notion that if you heard an owl hooting it was an omen of death.
- They have lots of old names, many derived from their daytime roosting spots, so you had ‘beech owl’, ‘wood owl’, ‘ivy owl’ and more oddly ‘hill hooter’.
- That beautiful, cryptic plumage is the perfect camouflage when the birds are roosting against tree trunks in the daytime.
- They seem to be rather averse to water and aren’t often seen flying over any substantial body of it, which might help explain why they’re not present on many of our islands and why they’re not found in Ireland.
- Like other owls, tawnies can turn their head through 270 degrees in order to look behind them. They have binocular vision, but their forward-facing eyes don’t swivel in their sockets so they have to turn their heads.



species, there are a number of different factors for their decline, with loss of woodland habitat and the old, hollow trees they prefer to nest in topping the list of problem issues.

The lack of suitable nesting sites of the type tawnies favour has been an issue for a few years now, but UK conservationists are currently concerned that the planned development of the new HS2 route will only make things worse.

“The loss of ancient woodland along the HS2 route is a real threat to tawny owl numbers,” Richard tells us. “The old large trees are the ones that have good nest holes in. While a lot of trees are being replanted, it will be a long time before these are of a suitable size to accommodate a nest box, never mind have good nest cavities of their own,” he warns.

Loss of woodland habitat and the lack of preferred nest sites is not the only thing tawnies have to worry about. “They also suffer from a disease called trichomoniasis, it’s one of the reasons wild tawnies are handed into us,” says Richard. He explains that this is the same disease that wiped out large numbers of greenfinch and warns that if this mutates or develops a resistance to treatment, it could be a real threat to tawny populations in future.

So what else can we do to come to this beautiful bird’s aid? The trust suggests that one of the simplest ways we can give tawny owls a helping hand is to provide them with starter homes.

“Nestboxes are always a great way for people to help and they’re easy to make. The trust is currently looking into the idea of running regular build-an-owl box courses. As long as there are

trees in your area, tawny owls can survive in a variety of habitats because of their eclectic diet.”

If you do erect a nestbox near you and are fortunate enough to get tawnies breeding in it, Richard advises you to resist the urge to intervene if you come across a young baby tawny owl out of the box that seems abandoned or looks like it can’t fend for itself. “In the breeding season it’s best to leave the babies alone if you stumble upon them,” he warns.

“The babies will call to the parents for food when they are hungry. The adults are often close by supervising their young; ready and waiting to dive-bomb any perceived threats,” he advises.

“Babies often leave nests early and come into contact with humans who then worry because they look helpless. They’re far from it. The chicks are well-equipped with eight razor sharp talons. The parents are even worse; they can be aggressive as well as being well-armed. As keepers at the trust, we wear chainsaw helmets with visors, and wear gloves to check nest boxes.”

Thankfully, there’s no need to don such serious protective gear when you’re out walking in your local woods in the hope of hearing or seeing one of these big-eyed hunters for yourself. But if you fancy a spot of fresh air, there are some useful tips for improving your chances of seeing or hearing one on the page opposite. 🦉

Further information

For more information about the World Owl Trust or to join and download the app, visit: owls.org. To find out how you can take part in the BTO’s Project Owl, visit: bto.org

THE EYES HAVE IT:

Tawnies have binocular vision and can turn their heads through 270 degrees to see what’s around them

On the owl prowl: how to spot a tawny in the wild

Tawny owls are Britain's commonest owl, but they can be tough to spot, even in an area where you know they're resident. Here's a quick guide to help you hear, and, hopefully, see one.

Now:

This is a great time to listen out for any local tawnies you might have nearby your house. Late summer and early autumn is when the young disperse, which prompts lots of noisy squabbling over territories.



Later this year:

December and January - listen out again because that's when a pair will start establishing their territory. The best time is to go out early morning or evening and position yourself near groups of trees or in local parkland.

Next spring:

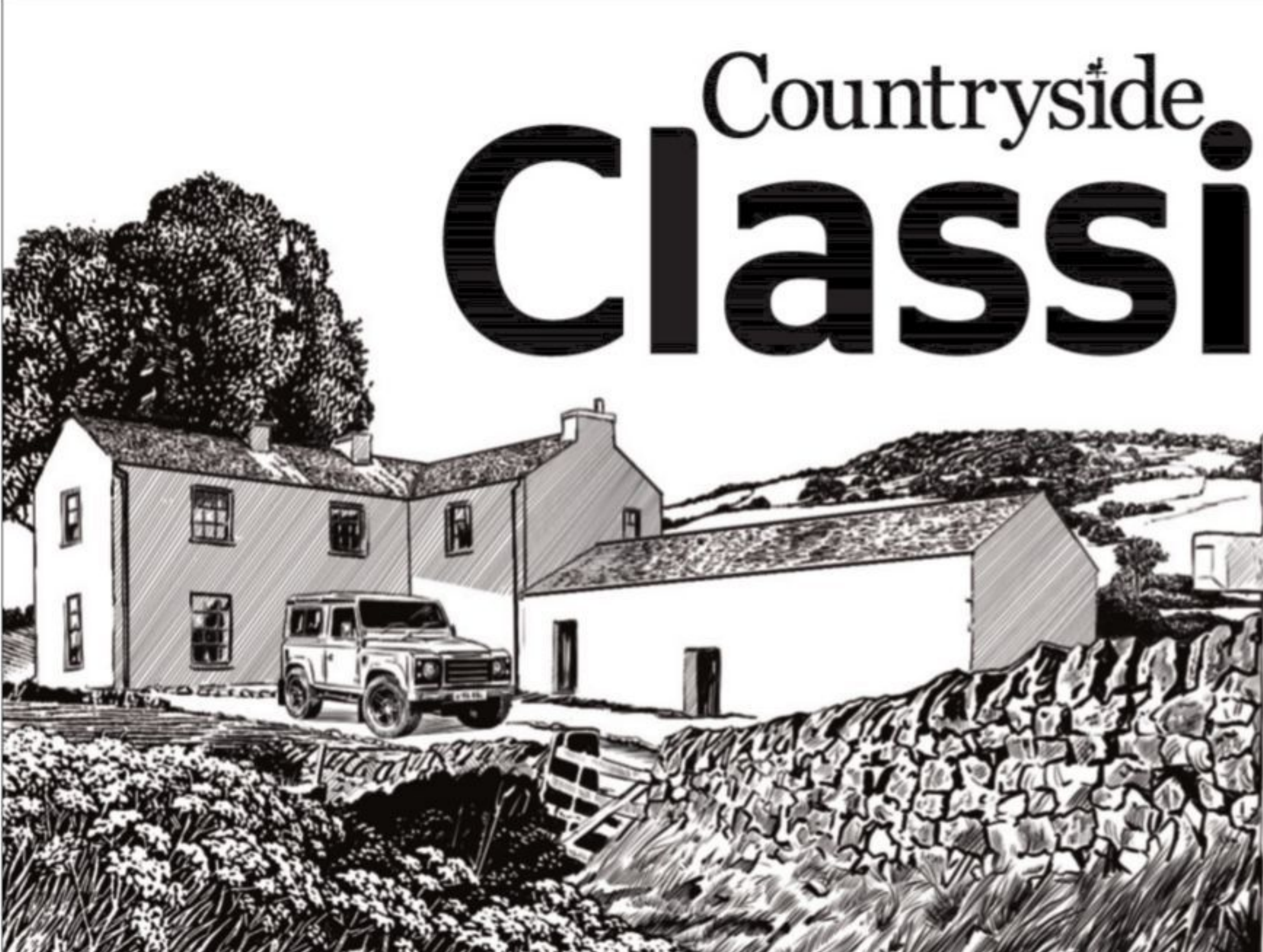
If you have tawnies nesting near you, you have a good chance of seeing them. "If they're nesting near you in late spring, you may hear a hoarse whistle when out and about in the dark," says Richard Cooper. "Follow the noise with a torch and you are likely to find a baby sat on a branch calling to the parents. It's best to observe from a distance, but it's a good way of actually seeing a tawny owl."



Find out more

You can learn more about tawny owls and their conservation via the following bodies. Some have advice on erecting and building tawny nest boxes. If you're short of time, you can find good owl nest boxes ready-built via reputable online wild bird food suppliers and a number of the well-known bird conservation bodies.

- World Owl Trust - owls.org
- British Trust for Ornithology - bto.org
- Hawk & Owl Trust - hawkandowltrust.org
- RSPB - rspb.org.uk
- Woodland Trust - woodlandtrust.org.uk
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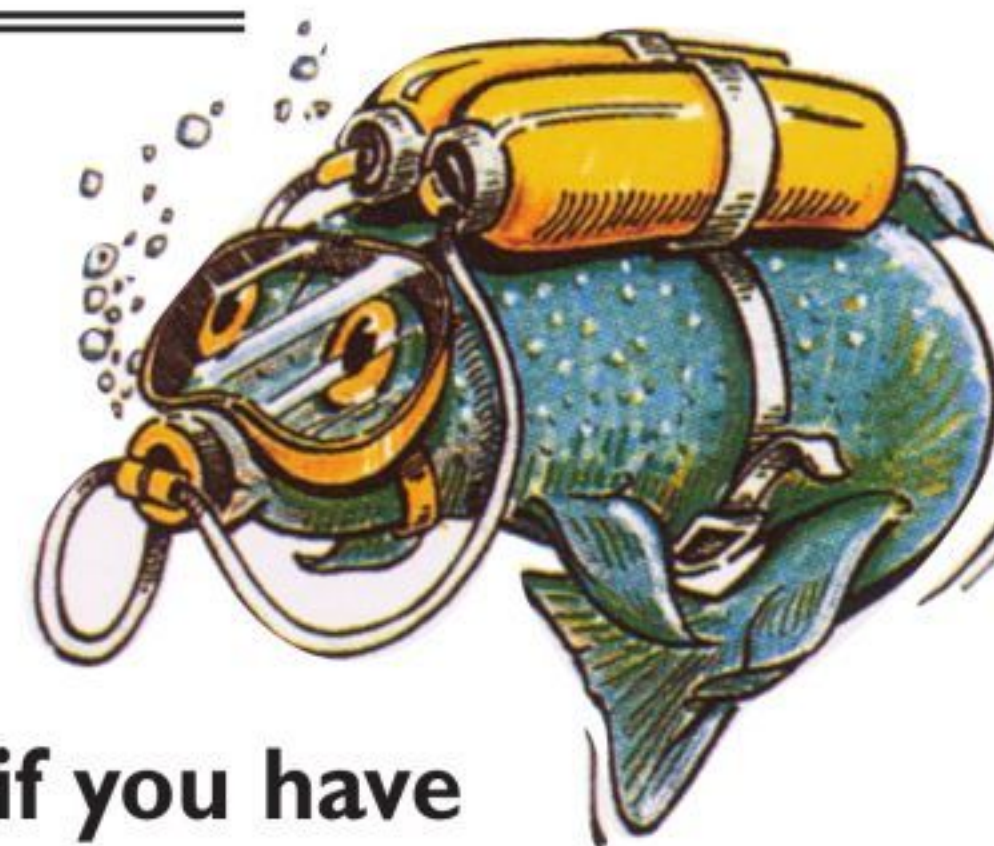
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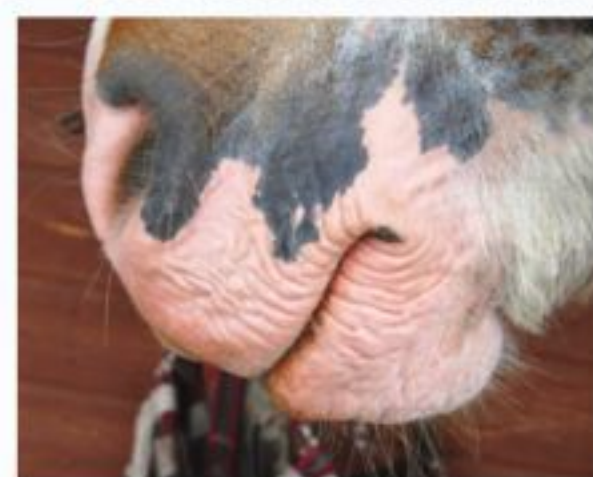
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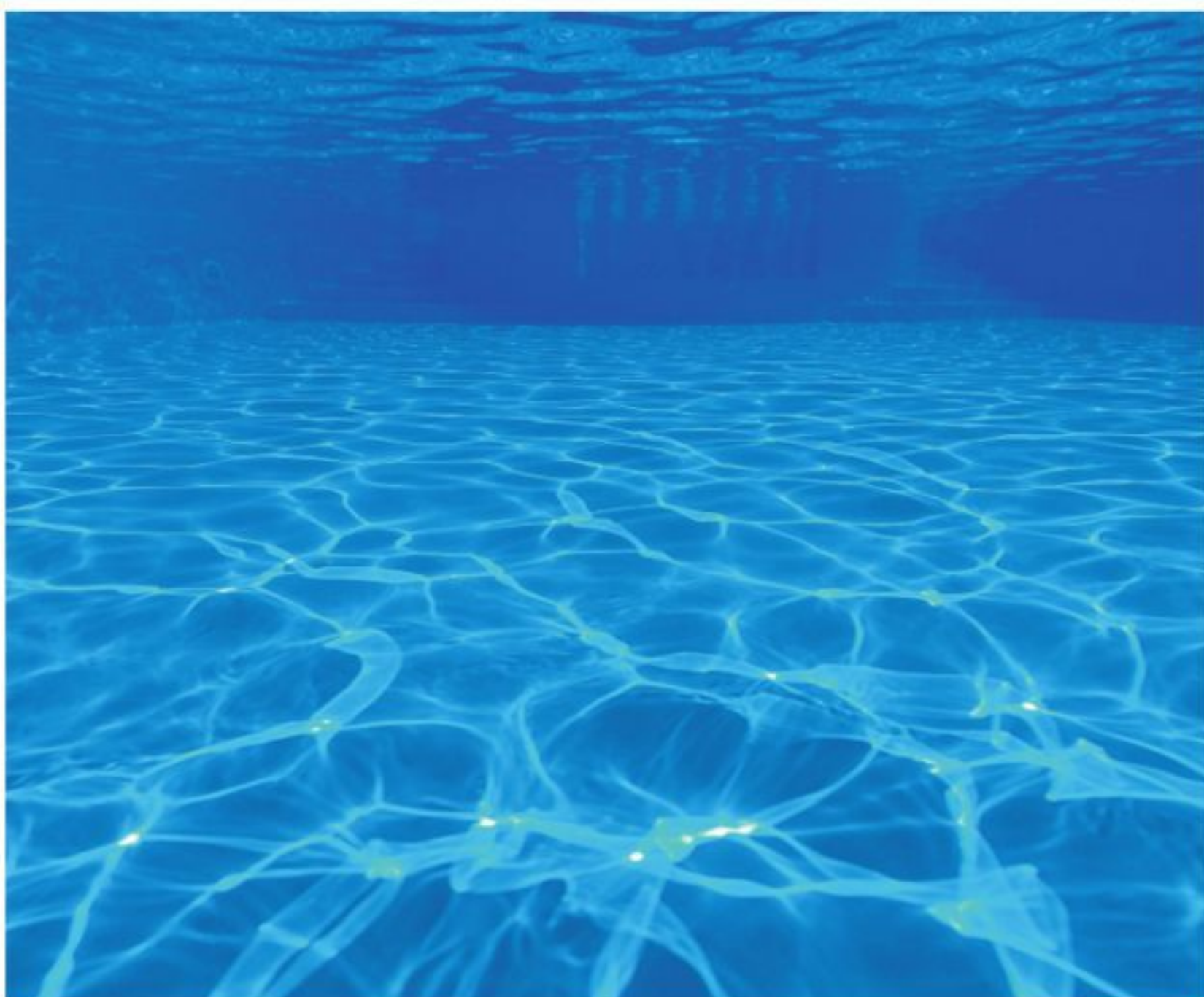
THREE THINGS

I can't live without



Michael Eavis is a dairy farmer and creator of the Glastonbury Festival, which takes place at his farm in Pilton, Somerset. The next festival will be in 2021.

The three things he can't live without are...



Swimming pool

I swim every day without fail; I've got a pool at the farm that used to be a reservoir for the festival. When we installed mains water, we didn't need it anymore, so we turned it into a pool.

I go every morning from 8am to 9am before I have my breakfast. I mostly go alone, but sometimes at the weekends the grandchildren join me, too.

The pool has solar panels so it's pretty warm and swimming is good for me - it's great for my lungs and my arms. It really lifts my spirits and leaves me invigorated and ready to take on the day.

Grapefruit

I have my breakfast after my swim and always have half a grapefruit - including the pith. Forty years ago, my mother sent me a newspaper article from *The Daily Telegraph* which said that by eating the pith of a grapefruit every day of your life, you'd never have a stroke - I tended to believe what she said, and I've done it every single day since.

I think there must be something in it though. A lot of my friends have had strokes; I'm nearly 84 and I haven't.

I find the Cypriot grapefruit are definitely the best; they have plenty of pith and you have to eat it all. I use a spoon to go right back down to the skin of the fruit.



Music (of course!)

I love music and am always listening to it and going through albums from lots of new bands to see who we should feature at the festival - I need to keep up-to-date!

I particularly like Taylor Swift - her music is just so good. I also listen to a lot of Frank Sinatra, too, and like to slip a bit of Van Morrison in there as well.

I've got an amazing sound system made by a great English company called Bowers and Wilkins, who are based in Worthing. It's so loud; the speakers are around five-feet high and really belt the music out! I find it seriously uplifting.



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